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THE

ENGLISH PREACHER:

OR,

SERMONS

ON THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS OF

RELIGION AND MORALITY,

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VARIOUS AUTHORS.

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ERRATA.

Page 116, line 8, *for* by, *read* be.
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SERMON I.

ON THE NATURE AND BENEFIT OF CONSIDERATION.

PSALM CXIX. 59.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies.

NO man who is convinced that there is a God, and conſiders the neceſſary and immediate conſequences of ſuch a perſuaſion, can think it ſafe to affront him by a wicked life: no man that believes

the happineſs or miſery of another world, and conſiders withal that one of theſe will certainly be his portion according as he demeans himſelf in the preſent life, can think it indifferent what courſe he takes. Men may thruſt away theſe thoughts and keep them out of their minds for a long time; but no man, that enters into the ſerious conſideration of theſe ſubjects, can poſſibly think it a thing indifferent to him whether he be happy or miſerable hereafter.

So that a great part of the evils of mens' lives would be cured, if they would but once lay them to heart. Would they but ſeriouſly conſider the conſequences of a wicked life, they would ſee ſo much reaſon and neceſſity for reforming it, that they would not venture to continue any longer in it. This courſe David took in the text, and he found the happy ſucceſs of it; "I thought on my "ways, and turned my feet unto thy "teſtimonies."

I ſhall endeavour in this diſcourſe to perſuade myſelf and you to take the ſame courſe which David here did, and God grant that it may be with the ſame effect.

To

To think on our ways may ſignify, in the firſt place, taking a general review of our lives; reſpecting indifferently our good and bad actions. For *way* is a metaphorical word, denoting the courſe of a man's life and actions. "I thought on my ways," that is, I examined my life, and called myſelf to a ſtrict account for the actions of it; I compared them with the law of God, the rule and meaſure of my duty, and conſidered how far I had obeyed that law, or offended againſt it; how much evil I had been guilty of, and how little good I had done, in compariſon of what I might and ought to have done: that by this means I might become acquainted with my true character, and diſcerning how many and great my faults and defects were, I might amend whatever was amiſs, and be more careful of my duty for the future.

And it muſt needs be a thing of excellent uſe, for men to ſet apart ſome particular ſeaſons for the examination of themſelves, that they may know how accounts ſtand between God and them. Pythagoras (or whoever was the author of thoſe golden verſes which paſs under his name) recommends this practice to

his ſcholars, every night before they ſlept, to call themſelves to account for the actions of the day paſt; inquiring wherein they had tranſgreſſed, what good they had done that day, or omitted to do. And this, no doubt, is an admirable means to improve men in virtue, a moſt effectual way to keep our conſciences continually awake and tender, and to make us ſtand in awe of ourſelves, and afraid to ſin, when we know beforehand that we muſt give ſo ſevere an account to ourſelves of every action.

It is certainly a great piece of wiſdom to make up our accounts as frequently as we can, that our repentance may in ſome meaſure keep pace with the errors and failings of our lives, and that we may not be oppreſſed and confounded by the inſupportable weight of the ſins of a whole life falling upon us at once; and that perhaps at the very worſt time, when we are ſick and weak, and have neither underſtanding nor leiſure to recollect ourſelves, and to call our ſins diſtinctly to remembrance, much leſs to exerciſe any proper acts of repentance for them. For there is nothing to be done in religion when our reaſon is

once

once departed from us; then darkneſs hath overtaken us indeed, and "the night is come when no man can work."

But thinking on our ways may likewiſe be underſtood as referring more particularly to the ſins and miſcarriages of our lives: "I thought on my ways," that is, I called my ſins to remembrance; I took a particular account of the errors of my life, and laid them ſeriouſly to heart; I conſidered all the circumſtances and conſequences of them; and reaſoning the matter throughly with myſelf, came to a peremptory and fixed reſolution of breaking off this wicked courſe of life, and betaking myſelf to the obedience of the laws of God. The conſideration of our ways taken in this ſenſe (which ſeems to be the more probable meaning of the words) may reaſonably imply in it theſe following particulars.

Firſt; Taking a particular account of our ſins, together with the ſeveral circumſtances and aggravations of them. And to this end we ſhall do well to reflect particularly upon the ſeveral ſtages and periods of our lives, and to recollect at leaſt the principal miſcarriages belonging to each of them. The better to ena-

ble us to do this, it will be uſeful to have before our eyes ſome abridgment or ſummary of the laws of God, containing the chief heads of our duties and ſins, of our virtues and vices; for this will help to bring many of our faults and neglects to our remembrance, which otherwiſe perhaps would have been forgotten by us. We ſhould likewiſe conſider the ſeveral relations wherein we have ſtood to others, and how far we have tranſgreſſed or failed of our duty in any of theſe reſpects.

Having thus far made up our ſad account, we may in a great meaſure perceive the number and greatneſs of our ſins; abating for ſome particulars which are ſlipped out of our memory, and for ſins of ignorance, and daily infirmities which are innumerable. By all which we may ſee what grievous offenders we have been; eſpecially if we take into conſideration the ſeveral heavy circumſtances of our ſins, which do above meaſure aggravate them; their having been committed againſt the clear knowledge of our duty, the frequent checks of our conſciences, the faithful admonitions of others, and our own moſt ſerious views and reſolutions; notwithſtanding the plain-

eſt

eſt declarations of God's will; notwithſtanding the terrors of the Lord revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men; notwithſtanding the ſufferings of the Son of God for our ſins; notwithſtanding the ingratitude of ſinning againſt the mercy and goodneſs of God, to which we have ſuch infinite obligations.

The conſideration of our way includes, ſecondly, a hearty trouble and ſorrow for ſin; "I thought on my ways," that is, I laid my ſins to heart. And ſurely, whenever we remember the faults and follies of our lives, we cannot but be inwardly touched and ſenſibly grieved at the thoughts of them; we cannot but ſmite upon our breaſts, and be in pain and heavineſs at our very hearts. I know that the tempers of men are different, and therefore I do not ſay that tears are abſolutely neceſſary to repentance, but they very well become it. Certainly, however, the conſideration of our ways ſhould cauſe inward trouble and contrition in our minds. The leaſt we can do, when we have done amiſs, is to be ſorry for it, to condemn our own folly, and to be full of diſpleaſure againſt ourſelves

for what we have done, and to reſolve never to do the like again. Let us make ſure that our trouble and ſorrow have this effect, to make us forſake our ſins; and then we ſhall need to be the leſs ſolicitous about the degrees and outward expreſſions of it.

The conſideration of our ways farther implies a conviction of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of a ſinful courſe: that ſin is the ſtain and blemiſh of our natures, the reproach of our reaſon and underſtanding, the diſeaſe and the deformity of our ſouls, the great enemy of our peace, the cauſe of all our fears and troubles: that whenever we do a wicked action we act contrary to the cleareſt dictates of our reaſon and conſcience, to our plain and true intereſt, and to the ſtrongeſt ties and obligations of duty and gratitude. And, which renders it yet more unreaſonable, ſin is a voluntary evil which men wilfully bring upon themſelves. Other evils may be forced upon us, whether we will or not; but no man is vicious but by his own choice. How do we betray our folly and weakneſs by ſuffering ourſelves to be hurried away by every fooliſh paſſion, to do things

things which we know to be hurtful to ourſelves; and ſo baſe and unworthy in themſelves that we are aſhamed to do them, not only in the preſence of a wiſe man, but even of a child or a fool! So that if ſin were followed with no other puniſhment beſides the guilt of having done a ſhameful thing, a man would not by intemperance make himſelf a fool and a beaſt; would not be falſe and unjuſt, treacherous or unthankful, if for no other reaſon, yet out of mere greatneſs and generoſity of mind, out of reſpect to the dignity of his nature, and out of very reverence to his own reaſon and underſtanding. For, let witty men ſay what they will in defence of their vices, there are ſo many natural acknowledgments of the evil and unreaſonableneſs of ſin that the matter is paſt all denial: men are generally uneaſy at the thoughts of an evil action, both before and after they have committed it; they are aſhamed to be taken in a crime, and heartily vexed and provoked when they are upbraided with it: and it is very obſervable, that though the greater part of the world always was bad, and vice hath ever had

more ſervants and followers than virtue, yet never was there any age ſo degenerate, in which vice could get the better of virtue in point of general eſteem and reputation: even they whoſe wills have been moſt enſlaved to ſin, could never yet ſo far bribe and corrupt their underſtandings as to make them give their full approbation to it.

A due ſenſe of the fearful and fatal conſequences of a wicked life is alſo included in the conſideration of our ways. And theſe are ſo ſad and dreadful, and the danger of them ſo evident and ſo perpetually threatning us, that no temptation can be ſufficient to excuſe a man to himſelf and his own reaſon for venturing upon them. A principal point of wiſdom is to look to the end of things; not only to conſider the preſent pleaſure and advantage of any thing, but alſo the ill conſequences of it for the future, and to balance them one againſt the other.

Now ſin in its own nature tends to make men miſerable. It certainly cauſes trouble and diſquiet of mind: and to a conſiderate man, that knows how to value the eaſe and ſatisfaction of his own mind, there cannot be a greater argument againſt

againſt ſin than to conſider that the forſaking of it is the only way to find reſt to our ſouls.

Beſides this, every vice is naturally attended with ſome particular miſchief and inconvenience, which makes it even in this life a puniſhment to itſelf; and commonly the Providence of God and his juſt judgment upon ſinners, concur to heighten the miſchievous conſequences of a ſinful courſe.

But all theſe are but light and inconſiderable in compariſon of the dreadful miſeries of another world; to the danger whereof every man who lives a wicked life doth every moment expoſe himſelf. So that if we could conquer ſhame, and had ſtupidity enough to bear the infamy and reproach of our vices, and the upbraidings of our conſciences for them, and the temporal miſchiefs and inconveniences attending them; though for our preſent gratification we could diſpenſe with all theſe; yet the conſideration of the end and iſſue of a ſinful courſe is an invincible objection againſt it, and never to be anſwered. Though the violence of our ſenſual appetites and inclinations ſhould be able to bear down all temporal conſiderations

whatſoever, yet methinks our everlaſting happineſs ſhould lie near our hearts; the dread of everlaſting deſtruction ſhould effectually diſcourage any man from a wicked life.

Laſtly; From this naturally follows a full conviction of the neceſſity of quitting this wicked courſe. And neceſſity is always a powerful and over-ruling argument: it doth rather compel than perſuade, and, after it is once evident, leaves no place for farther deliberation. The greater the neceſſity is, ſtill the more cogent is the argument. For whatever is neceſſary is ſo in order to ſome end, and the greater the end the greater is the neceſſity of the means without which that end cannot be obtained. Now the chief and laſt end of all reaſonable creatures is happineſs, and therefore whatever is neceſſary to ſecure this, hath the higheſt degree of rational and moral neceſſity. We are not capable of happineſs till we have forſaken our ſins; "for without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord."

But though men are convinced of this neceſſity, yet this doth not always produce a preſent change; becauſe men hope that they may continue in their ſins, and remedy

medy all at laſt by repentance. But this is ſo great a hazard in all reſpects, that there is no venturing upon it. And in matters of greateſt concernment wiſe men will run no hazards, if they can help it. David was ſo ſenſible of this danger, that he would not defer his repentance and the change of his life for one moment; "I thought on my ways, and turned my "feet unto thy teſtimonies: I made haſte "and delayed not to keep thy command-"ments." This day, this hour, for aught we know, may be the laſt opportunity of making our peace with God. He that cannot promiſe himſelf the next moment, hath a great deal of reaſon to ſeize upon the preſent opportunity. While we are lingering in our ſins, if God be not merciful to us, we ſhall be conſumed. Therefore make haſte, ſinner, and "eſcape for thy life, leſt evil over-take thee."

Having thus conſidered the courſe which David took for reforming his life, I proceed to take notice of the ſucceſs of this courſe. It produced actual and ſpeedy reformation. "I thought on my "ways, and turned my feet unto thy "teſtimonies: I made haſte, and delayed "not

" not to keep thy commandments." And if we conſider the matter throughly, and have but patience to reaſon out the caſe with ourſelves, and to bring our thoughts and deliberations to ſome iſſue, the concluſion muſt naturally be the quitting of that evil and dangerous courſe in which we have lived. For ſin and conſideration cannot long dwell together. Did but men conſider what ſin is, they would have ſo many unanſwerable objections to it, ſuch ſtrong fears and jealouſies of the miſerable iſſue and event of a wicked life, that they would not dare to continue any longer in it.

I do not ſay that this change is perfectly made at once. A ſtate of ſin and holineſs are not like two ways that are juſt parted by a line, ſo that a man may ſtep out of the one directly into the other; but they are like two ways that lead to two very diſtant places, and conſequently are at a good diſtance from one another, and the farther any man hath travelled in the one the farther he is from the other. Evil habits are maſtered and ſubdued by degrees, and with a great deal

deal of conflict, and frequently, after they are routed, they rally and make head again; and it is a great while before the contrary habits of virtue are grown up to any conſiderable degree of ſtrength and maturity; before a man comes to that confirmed ſtate of goodneſs that he may be ſaid to have conquered and mortified his luſts. But yet this ought not to diſcourage us. For if we purſue our advantages we ſhall every day gain ground, and the work will grow eaſier upon our hands; and we who moved at firſt with ſo much ſlowneſs and difficulty, ſhall after a while be enabled to run the ways of God's commandments with pleaſure and delight.

To perſuade men to follow the courſe which David purſued with ſo much ſucceſs, I ſhall now add the following arguments.

Firſt; Conſideration is the proper act of reaſonable creatures. This argument God himſelf uſes, to bring men to a conſideration of their evil ways. "Remember, and ſhew yourſelves men; bring "it again to mind, O ye tranſgreſſors." To conſider our ways and to call our ſins

to

to remembrance, is to ſhew ourſelves men. It is the great fault of too many, that they generally live without thinking, and are acted by their preſent inclinations and appetites without any conſideration of the future conſequences of things, and without fear of any thing but of a preſent and ſenſible danger; like brute creatures, who fear no evils but what are in view and juſt ready to fall upon them: whereas to a prudent and conſiderate man, a good or evil in reverſion is capable of as true an eſtimation, proportionably to the greatneſs and diſtance of it, as if it were really preſent. And what do we think God has given us our reaſon and underſtanding for, but to foreſee evils at a diſtance, and to prevent them; to provide for our future ſecurity and happineſs; to look up "to "God our Maker, who hath taught us "more than the beaſts of the earth, and "made us wiſer than the fowls of hea-"ven?"

Again; it is the end of the patience and long-ſuffering of God towards us, to bring us to conſideration; the great deſign of his goodneſs is to "lead men to "repent-

" repentance." He bears long with us, and delays the puniſhment of our ſins, and doth not execute judgment ſpeedily, becauſe he is loth to ſurpriſe men into deſtruction, but would give them time to reflect upon themſelves, and to conſider what they have done, and to reaſon themſelves into repentance. " Conſider this, all ye that forget God, " leſt he tear you in pieces, and there " be none to deliver."

Finally; Conſideration is that which we muſt all come to, at one time or another. The time will come when we ſhall conſider and cannot help it, when we ſhall not be able to divert our thoughts from thoſe things which we are now ſo loth to think upon. Our conſciences will take their opportunity to bring our ways to remembrance, when ſome great calamity or affliction is upon us. Thus it was with the prodigal; when he was brought to the very laſt extremity, and " was ready to periſh with hunger," then " he came to himſelf." When we come to die, then we ſhall think of our ways with trouble and vexation enough, and wiſh in vain

that

that we had more time to conſider them. And certainly, in the other world, a great part of the miſery of wicked men will conſiſt in bitter reflections upon themſelves and the evil actions of their lives. It is ſaid of the rich voluptuous man in the parable, that "in hell he lift up his eyes being in torment;" as if he had never conſidered and bethought himſelf till that time. But alas! it will then be too late to conſider; for then conſideration will do us no good; it will ſerve to no other purpoſe but to aggravate our miſery, and to multiply our ſtings, and to give new life and rage to thoſe vultures which will perpetually prey upon our hearts. But how much wiſer courſe would it be to conſider theſe things in time, in order to our eternal peace and comfort; to think of them while we may redreſs them and avoid the diſmal conſequences of them, than when our caſe is deſperate and paſt remedy?

And now what can I ſay more to perſuade every one of us to a conſideration of our own ways? We are generally apt to buſy ourſelves in obſerving the errors and miſcarriages of our neighbours, and

and are forward to mark and cenſure the faults and follies of other men; but how few deſcend into themſelves, and turn their eyes inward, and ſay, what have I done? It is an excellent ſaying of Antoninus the great emperor and philoſopher, "No man was ever unhappy for "not prying into the actions and condi-"tions of other men, but that man is "neceſſarily unhappy who doth not ob-"ſerve himſelf, and conſider the ſtate of "his own ſoul."

I know it is a very unpleaſant work which I am now putting you upon, and therefore no wonder that men are generally ſo backward to it; becauſe it will of neceſſity give ſome preſent diſturbance to their minds. They whoſe lives have been very vicious, are ſo odious a ſight, ſo horrid a ſpectacle to themſelves, that they cannot endure to reflect upon their own ways; of all things in the world they hate conſideration, and are ready to ſay to it as the evil ſpirit did in the goſpel to our Saviour, "What have I to do "with thee? Art thou come to torment "me before the time?" But let not this affright you from it; for whatever trou-

ble

ble it may cauſe at preſent, it is the only way to ſave you from eternal deſtruction.

The things which I have offered to your conſideration are of the utmoſt importance. They do not concern your bodies and eſtates, but that which is more truly yourſelves, your immortal ſouls, the deareſt and moſt durable part of yourſelves: and they do not concern you for a ſhort time only, but for ever. Let me therefore beſpeak your moſt ſerious regard to them in the words of Moſes to the people of Iſrael, after he had ſet the law of God before them, together with the bleſſings promiſed to obedience, and the terrible curſe threatned to the tranſgreſſion of it; "Set your hearts to the "words which I teſtify to you this day, "for it is not a vain thing, becauſe it is "your life." Your life, your eternal life and happineſs depend upon it.

Conſider what you have done, and then conſider what is fit for you to do, and if you do it not, what will be the end of theſe things. To aſſiſt you in this work it is not neceſſary that I ſhould lay open the vices of the age, and ſet mens' ſins in order before them. It is much

better

better that you yourſelves ſhould call your own ways to remembrance. We have every one a faithful monitor and witneſs in our own breaſts, who, if we will but hearken to him, will deal impartially with us, and privately tell us the errors of our lives. To this monitor I refer you, and to the bleſſing of God to make theſe admonitions effectual.

SER-

SERMON II.

ON THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF IRRESOLUTION AND DELAYING.

PSALM cxix. 60.

I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

IN the words immediately preceding, you have the courſe which David took for the reforming of his life, and the ſucceſs of that courſe, "I thought on "my ways, and turned my feet unto thy "teſtimonies." And you have a conſiderable

derable circumſtance added in theſe words, that his reformation was ſpeedy and without delay, "I made haſte, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Upon due conſideration of his former life, and a full conviction of the neceſſity of a change, he reſolved upon a better life, and immediately executed this reſolution.

My preſent buſineſs ſhall be, to endeavour to convince men of the folly and unreaſonableneſs of delaying the reformation of their lives; and to perſuade them to reſolve upon it, and having reſolved, to ſet about it immediately. To this end, I ſhall conſider the reaſons and excuſes which men pretend for delaying this neceſſary work, and ſhew the unreaſonableneſs of them; and then add ſome farther conſiderations to engage men to ſet about this work ſpeedily and without delay.

Many pretend that they are abundantly convinced of the great neceſſity of leaving their ſins and betaking themſelves to a better courſe, and they fully intend to do ſo; only they cannot at preſent bring themſelves to it, but they hope hereafter to be in a better temper

temper and diſpoſition, and then they reſolve to ſet about this work in good earneſt, and to go through with it.

I know not whether it be proper to call this a reaſon; I am ſure it is the greateſt cheat and deluſion that any man can put upon himſelf. For it plainly ſhews that he doth not intend to do that which he is convinced is ſo neceſſary, but to put it off from day to day. There is no greater evidence that a man doth not really intend to do a thing, than when notwithſtanding he ought upon all accounts, and may in all reſpects, better do it at preſent than hereafter, yet he ſtill puts it off. Whatever he may pretend, this is a mere ſhift to get rid of a preſent trouble. It is like giving good words and making fair promiſes to a clamorous and importunate creditor, and appointing him to come another day, when the man knows in his conſcience that he intends not to pay him, and that he ſhall be leſs able to diſcharge the debt then, than he is at preſent. Whatever reaſons he hath againſt reforming his life now, they will ſtill remain, and be in as full force hereafter, nay probably ſtronger than they are at preſent. He is unwilling

now, and ſo he will be hereafter, and probably much more unwilling. So that this reaſon will every day improve upon his hands, and have ſo much the more ſtrength by how much the longer he continues in his ſins. He has no reaſon in the world againſt the preſent time but only that it is *preſent*; why, when *hereafter* comes to be *preſent*, the reaſon will be juſt the ſame. So that his preſent unwillingneſs is ſo far from being a juſt reaſon againſt it, that it is a good reaſon the other way: becauſe he is unwilling now, and likely to be ſo, nay more ſo hereafter, if he intendeth to do it at all, he ſhould ſet about it immediately, and without delay.

Another reaſon which men pretend for the delaying of this work is, the great difficulty and unpleaſantneſs of it. And it cannot be denied but that there will be ſome bitterneſs and uneaſineſs in it, proportionable to the growth of evil habits, and our greater or leſs progreſs and continuance in a ſinful courſe. When nature hath been long bent another way, it is not to be expected that it ſhould be reduced and brought back to its firſt ſtraightneſs without pain and violence.

But

But then it is to be conſidered, that how difficult and painful ſoever this work be, it is neceſſary, and that ſhould overrule all other conſiderations whatſoever; that if we will not be at this pains and trouble, we muſt one time or other endure far greater than thoſe which we now ſeek to avoid; that it is not ſo difficult as we imagine, but our fears of it are greater than the trouble will prove; and that if we were once reſolved upon the work, and ſeriouſly engaged in it, the greateſt part of the trouble would be over. The main difficulty and unpleaſantneſs is in our firſt entrance into the path of religion; it preſently grows tolerable, and ſoon after eaſy.

We ſhould conſider likewiſe what is the true cauſe of all this trouble and difficulty; it is our long continuance in a ſinful courſe that hath made us ſo loth to leave it; it is the cuſtom of ſinning which renders it ſo troubleſome and uneaſy to men to do otherwiſe. It is the greatneſs of our guilt, heightned and inflamed by many and repeated provocations, which fills our ſouls with ſo much terror; it is becauſe we have gone ſo far in an evil way, that our retreat is become ſo difficult, and becauſe we have delayed this work ſo

long that we are now ſo unwilling to ſet about it; and conſequently, the longer we delay it, the trouble and difficulty of a change will the more increaſe upon us. All theſe conſiderations are ſo far from being good reaſons for farther delay, that they are ſtrong arguments to the contrary. Becauſe the work is difficult now, therefore do not make it more ſo; and becauſe your delays have increaſed the difficulty of it, and will do more and more, therefore delay no longer.

Another pretended encouragement to theſe delays, is the great mercy and patience of God. He commonly bears longer with ſinners, and therefore there is no ſuch abſolute and urgent neceſſity of a ſpeedy repentance and reformation of our lives. "Becauſe ſentence againſt an "evil work is not executed ſpeedily, "therefore the heart of the ſons of men "is fully ſet in them to do evil."

But what can be more unreaſonable and diſingenuous than to reſolve to be evil becauſe God is good; becauſe he ſuffers ſo long, to ſin ſo much the longer, and becauſe he affords ſpace for repentance, therefore to delay it, and put it off to the laſt? The proper deſign

of

of the goodneſs of God, is to lead men to repentance; and he never intended his patience for an encouragement to men to continue in their ſins, but for an opportunity and an argument to break them off by repentance.

Theſe are the pretended reaſons and encouragements to men to delay the repentance and reformation of their lives; and you ſee how groundleſs and unreaſonable they are.

I ſhall now add ſome farther conſiderations, to engage men effectually to ſet about this work ſpeedily, and without delay. And becauſe they are many, I ſhall inſiſt upon thoſe which are moſt weighty and conſiderable, without being very curious and ſolicitous about the method and order of them: for, provided they be but effectual to the end of perſuaſion, it matters not how inartificially they are ranged and diſpoſed.

Conſider, firſt, that in matters of great and neceſſary concernment, and which muſt be done, there is no greater argument of a weak and impotent mind than irreſolution; to be undetermined, where the caſe is ſo plain, and the neceſſity ſo urgent;

to be always about doing that which we are convinced muſt be done.

We are always intending to live a new life, but can never find a time to ſet about it. This is as if a man ſhould put off eating and drinking and ſleeping, from one day and night to another, till he have ſtarved and deſtroyed himſelf.

It ſeldom falls under any man's deliberation, whether he ſhould live or not, if he can chuſe; and if he cannot chuſe, it is in vain to deliberate about it. It is much more abſurd to deliberate, whether we ſhould live virtuouſly or religiouſly, ſoberly or righteouſly in the world, for this in effect is to conſult whether a man ſhould be happy or not: nature hath determined this for us, and we need not reaſon about it; and conſequently, we ought not to delay that which we are convinced is ſo neceſſary in order to it.

Conſider, farther, that religion is a great and a long work, and aſks ſo much time that there is none left for delay. To begin with repentance, which is commonly our firſt entrance into religion: this alone is a great work, and not the buſineſs of a ſudden thought and reſolution only, but of execution and action.

The

The habits of vice are not to be plucked up and caſt off at once, as they have been long in contracting; for they are conquered juſt by the ſame degrees that the habits of virtue grow up and get ſtrength in us.

There are ſeveral duties to be done in religion, and often to be repeated: many virtues are to be long practiſed before the contrary vices will be ſubdued, and before we arrive at a confirmed and ſettled ſtate of goodneſs, ſuch a ſtate as can only give us a clear and comfortable evidence of the ſincerity of our reſolution and repentance. We have many luſts to mortify; many paſſions to govern and bring into order; much good to do, and to make what amends and reparation we can for the evil we have done: we have many things to learn; and many to unlearn, to which we ſhall be ſtrongly prompted by the corrupt inclinations of our hearts, and the remaining power of ill habits and cuſtoms: and perhaps we have ſatisfaction and reſtitution to make for injuries which we have done to others, in their perſons, or eſtates, or reputations. In a word, we have to "cleanſe "ourſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and

" ſpirit, and to perfect holineſs in the " fear of God;" to increaſe and improve our graces and virtues; " to add to our " faith knowledge, and temperance, and " patience, and brotherly kindneſs, and " charity; and to abound in all the fruits " of righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus " Chriſt to the praiſe and glory of God." We have to be uſeful to the world, and exemplary to others in a holy and virtuous converſation: our " light is ſo to " ſhine before men, that others may ſee " our good works, and glorify our father " which is in heaven."

And do we think all this is to be done in an inſtant, and requires no time; that we may delay and put off to the laſt, and yet do all this work well enough? Do we think we can do all this in time of ſickneſs and old age, when we are not fit to do any thing; when the ſpirit of a man can hardly bear the infirmities of nature, much leſs a guilty conſcience and a wounded ſpirit? Do we think that when the day hath been idly ſpent and ſquandred away by us, we ſhall be fit to work when the night and darkneſs comes? When our underſtanding is weak, and our memory frail, and our will by a long cuſtom

cuſtom of ſinning obſtinately bent the wrong way, what can we then do in religion? What reaſonable or acceptable ſervice can we then perform to God? When our candle is juſt ſinking into the ſocket, how ſhall "our light ſo ſhine be-"fore men, that others may ſee our good "works?"

Alas! the longeſt life is no more than ſufficient for a man to reform himſelf in, to repent of the errors of his life, and to amend what is amiſs: to train up himſelf for eternity, and to make himſelf "meet to be a partaker of the inheri-"tance of the ſaints in light."

Again, Conſider what a deſperate hazard we run by theſe delays. Every delay of repentance is venturing the main chance. It is uncertain whether hereafter we ſhall have time for it; and if we have time, whether we ſhall have inclination, and the aſſiſtance of God to go thorough with it. God indeed hath been graciouſly pleaſed to promiſe pardon to repentance; but he hath no where promiſed life and leiſure, and the aids of his holy ſpirit to thoſe who put off their repentance: he hath no where promiſed acceptance to mere ſorrow and trouble for ſin, without "fruits

" meet for repentance, and amendment " of life:" he hath no where promiſed to receive thoſe to mercy and favour, who only leave their ſins when they can keep them no longer. Many have gone ſo far in times of affliction and ſickneſs, as to be awakened to a ſenſe of their ſins, to be troubled for their wicked lives, and to make ſolemn promiſes and profeſſions of becoming better; and yet upon their deliverance and recovery, all hath vaniſhed and come to nothing, and their " righteouſneſs hath been as the morning " cloud, and as the early dew which paſ- " ſeth away." And why ſhould any man, merely upon account of a death-bed repentance, reckon himſelf in a better condition than thoſe perſons who have done as much and gone as far as he? There is no other difference between them but this, that the repentance of the former was tried, and proved ſincere, but the death-bed repentance never came to a trial; and God knows whether it was ſincere or not, and how it would have proved, if the man had lived longer. Why ſhould any man for offering up to God the mere refuſe and dregs of his life, and the days which he himſelf hath no pleaſure in, expect to receive the reward

ward of eternal life and happineſs at his hands?

But, though we do not deſign to delay this work ſo long, yet ought we to conſider that all delays in a matter of this conſequence are extremely dangerous; becauſe we put off a buſineſs of the greateſt importance to the future, and in ſo doing put it to the hazard whether ever it ſhall be done; for the future is as much out of our power to command, as it is to call back the time which is paſt. Indeed if we could arreſt time and ſtrike off the wheels of his chariot, if we could like Joſhua bid the ſun ſtand ſtill, and make opportunity tarry as long as we had occaſion for it; this were ſome excuſe for our delay, or might at leaſt mitigate or abate the folly and unreaſonableneſs of it: but this we cannot do. It is in our power by divine aſſiſtance to amend our lives now, but it is not in our power to prolong them till to-morrow.

Lay hold then upon the preſent opportunity, and look upon every action you do, and every opportunity of doing any, as poſſibly your laſt; for ſo it may prove, for any thing you can tell to the contrary.

Since the delay of repentance chiefly ariſes from the hope and encouragement of a future repentance, let us conſider a little how unreaſonable this hope is, and how abſurd the encouragement is which men take from it. To ſin in hope that hereafter we ſhall repent, is to do a thing in hope that we ſhall one day be heartily aſhamed of it, that we ſhall one time or other be grieved and troubled that we have done it: it is to do a thing in hope that we ſhall afterwards condemn ourſelves for it, and wiſh a thouſand times we had never done it.

If you be ſtill reſolved to delay this buſineſs and put it off at preſent, conſider well with yourſelves how long you intend to delay it. I hope not to the laſt, nor till ſickneſs come, and death make his approach to you. It is next to madneſs to venture all upon ſuch an after-game. It is juſt as if a man ſhould be content to be ſhipwreck'd, in hope that he ſhall afterwards eſcape by a plank, and get ſafe to ſhore. But I hope none are ſo unreaſonable: yet I fear that many are inclined to put it off to old age, though they do not care to ſay ſo. Seneca

ca expoſtulates excellently with this ſort of men; "Who ſhall enſure thy life till "that time? Who ſhall paſs his word "for thee, that the providence of God "will ſuffer all things to happen and fall "out, juſt as thou haſt deſigned and fore-"caſt them? Art thou not aſhamed to "reſerve the reliques of thy life for thy-"ſelf, and ſet apart only that time to be "wiſe and virtuous in, which is good "for nothing? How late is it, then to "begin to live well, when thy life is al-"moſt at an end? What a ſtupid for-"getfulneſs is it of our mortality, to put "off good reſolutions to the fiftieth or "ſixtieth year of our age, and reſolve "to begin to do better, at that time of "life to which very few perſons have "reached?"

But perhaps you are not altogether ſo unreaſonable, but deſire only to put off this work till the firſt heat of youth and paſſion be over, till the cooler and more conſiderate part of life comes on; that perhaps you think may be the fitteſt and moſt convenient ſeaſon. But ſtill we reckon upon uncertainties, for perhaps that ſeaſon may never be: however, it is certainly much more in our power

to

to reſiſt the moſt violent temptations to vice, than either to ſecure the future time, or to recover that which is once paſt and gone.

Some ſeem yet more reaſonable, and are content to come lower, and deſire only to put it off for a very little while. But why for a little while? Why till to-morrow? To-morrow will be as this day, only with this difference, that they will in all probability be more unwilling and indiſpoſed then.

So that there is no future time which any man can reaſonably pitch upon. All delay in this caſe is dangerous, and as ſenſleſs as the expectation of the idiot deſcribed by the poet, who being come to the river-ſide and intending to paſs over, ſtays till all the water in the river be gone by, and hath left the channel a dry paſſage for him. But the river runs, and runs, and will run: and if he ſhould ſtay a thouſand years, will never be the nearer being dry.

Laſtly; Conſider what an unſpeakable happineſs it is to have our minds ſettled in that condition, that we may without fear and amazement, nay with comfort and

and confidence, expect death and judgment. Death is never far from any of us, and the general judgment of the world may be nearer than we are aware of; for "of that day and hour knoweth no man." Now nothing can free us from the dread of these events but a good conscience; and a good conscience is only to be had either by innocence, or by repentance and amendment of life. Happy man! who by this means is at peace with God, and with himself; and can think of death and judgment without dread and astonishment. For "the sting of death is sin;" and the terror of the great day only concerns those who have lived wickedly and impenitently, and have not been persuaded, either by the mercies of God, or by the fear of his judgments, to repent and turn to him. But if we have truly forsaken our sins, and sincerely endeavour to live in obedience to the commands of God, the more we think of death and judgment, the greater matter of joy and comfort will these events be to us: for "blessed is that servant, whom "his Lord when he cometh shall find so "doing."

And

And now I hope that enough hath been ſaid to convince men of the great unreaſonableneſs and folly of theſe delays; nay I believe that moſt men are convinced of it by their own thoughts, and that their conſciences often reproach them for it: but, O that I knew what to ſay that might prevail with men, and effectually perſuade them, to do that which they are ſo abundantly convinced is ſo neceſſary!

And here I might addreſs myſelf to perſons of the ſeveral ages of life. You that are young, and have hitherto been in a good meaſure innocent, may by an early piety give God the firſt poſſeſſion of your ſouls; and by this means never be put to the trouble of ſo great and ſolemn a repentance, having never been deeply engaged in a wicked life; you may do a glorious, I had almoſt ſaid a meritorious thing, in cleaving ſtedfaſtly to God and reſolving to ſerve him, when you are ſo importunately ſolicited to a contrary courſe. However, you may not live to be old; therefore upon that conſideration begin the work preſently, and make uſe of the opportunity that is now in your hands.

You

You that are arrived at maturity of years, and are in the full vigour of your age, you are to be put in mind that the heat and inconſiderateneſs of youth is now paſt and gone; that reaſon and conſideration are now in their perfection and ſtrength; that this is the very age of prudence and diſcretion; ſo that now is the proper time for you to be ſerious, and wiſely to ſecure your future happineſs.

As for thoſe that are old, they methinks ſhould not need any one to admoniſh them, that it is now high time for them to begin a new life, and that the time paſt of their lives is too much to have ſpent in ſin and folly. There is no trifling where men have a great work to do, and but little time to do it in. Your ſun is certainly going down and near its ſetting, therefore you ſhould quicken your pace, conſidering that your journey is not the ſhorter becauſe you have but little time to perform it in.

To conclude; Let us not put off this neceſſary work of reforming ourſelves, in what part and age of our lives ſoever we be: "to day, whilſt it is called to "day, leſt any of you be hardened "through

" through the deceitfulneſs of ſin."

Art thou convinced that thy eternal happineſs depends upon following the advice which hath now been given thee? Then only act in this caſe, as all prudent men are wont to do in matters which they cannot but acknowledge to be of far leſs moment. If a man be travelling, as ſoon as he finds himſelf out of his way, he ſtops and makes towards the right path, and hath no inclination to go wrong any farther: if a man be ſick, he will regain his health as ſoon as poſſible, and not put it off to the future: moſt men will gladly take the firſt opportunity that preſents itſelf of being rich or great; almoſt every man ſeizes the firſt offer of a great place or a good purchaſe, and ſecures them immediately if he can. Do thou act in the ſame manner in affairs of greater importance. Return from the error of thy ways without delay; be wiſe, and ſave thyſelf as ſoon as poſſible. When happineſs preſents itſelf to thee, do not turn it off, and bid it come again to-morrow. Perhaps the day of ſalvation may not come again to-morrow; nay perhaps to thee to-morrow may never come.

come. But if we were ſure that happineſs would come again, yet why ſhould we put it off? Does any man know how to be ſafe and happy to-day, and can he think of deferring it till to-morrow?

Now the God of all mercy and patience give every one of us the wiſdom and grace to know and do, "in this our "day, the things that belong to our "peace, before they be hid from our "eyes!" Amen.

SER-

SERMON III.

CHARITY THE MOST PERFECT BOND OF UNION.

COLOSSIANS iii. 14.

Above all theſe things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectneſs.

THE uniting of chriſtians in love and affection being one main deſign of the goſpel, both our Saviour and his apoſtles have been very frequent and

and earneſt in their exhortations, to keep them mindful of this duty. Our Lord has made it a peculiar and diſtinguiſhing mark of our relation to him, that we have a mutual affection and concern for each other: "A new commandment," ſays he to his apoſtles when he was taking his leave of them, "give I unto you, that ye love one an-"other; as I have loved you, that ye "alſo love one another. By this ſhall "all men know that ye are my diſciples, "if ye have love one to another." And again, juſt before his crucifixion, he prays, "Holy Father, keep through thine own "name, thoſe whom thou haſt given me, "that they may be one, as we are." Afterwards he adds, "That they may all "be one, as thou Father art in me, and "I in thee, that they alſo may be one in "us."

The apoſtles alſo, in their writings, frequently preſs this duty upon us, in the moſt pathetic manner. They exhort us "to be all of one mind; having com-"paſſion one of another, to love as "brethren: to put on, as the elect of "God, holy and beloved, bowels of "mercy, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, "meek-

" meekneſs, long-ſuffering; forbearing " one another, and forgiving one ano- " ther." St. Paul ſays, " If there be " any conſolation in Chriſt, if any com- " fort of love, if any fellowſhip of the " ſpirit, if any bowels and mercies; ful- " fil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, " having the ſame love, being of one ac- " cord, of one mind." And again, " We then that are ſtrong, ought to bear " the infirmities of the weak, and not to " pleaſe ourſelves." He inſtructs us to " receive him that is weak in the faith" into our communion, " but not to doubt- ful diſputations," not regarding his being of a different opinion from ourſelves: and that if we " have faith, we ſhould have it to ourſelves before God," and " not walk ſo uncharitably," by making a rigid indiſcreet uſe of our liberty, " as to deſtroy him for whom Chriſt died." " Let us therefore," ſays he, " follow " after the things which make for peace, " and things wherewith one may edify " another."

If from theſe precepts of Chriſt and his apoſtles we proceed to enquire what has been the practice of the church, it would give us but too juſt an occaſion

occaſion to lament the degenerate ſtate of chriſtianity. The quarrels and contentions which have ariſen among chriſtians, who have alternately vexed and perſecuted each other on account of different opinions about ſpeculative points, have been a diſgrace to chriſtianity: and the remembrance of them ought to put all wiſe and good men upon endeavouring to find out ſome effectual method of eſtabliſhing a unity of ſpirit amongſt us; that, how different ſoever our private ſentiments may be, in the difficult and abſtruſe points of revelation, we may all however agree in charity, and brotherly affection, and mutual forbearance; and, if poſſible, join together in chriſtian communion, and "with one mind, and "one mouth, glorify God, even the fa-"ther of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt."

The direction of the apoſtle in my text would go very far, if truly complied with, towards accompliſhing this great end: for if we had more charity, and leſs pride, we ſhould have a regard to other men's judgments as well as our own; and think it as reaſonable that their eaſe, and ſatisfaction, and happineſs ſhould be conſulted by them, as our own is by us.

Charity

Charity would dictate thus; and therefore the apoſtle ſays, it is "the bond of perfectneſs," that is, the moſt perfect bond of union among chriſtians.

I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate this point more fully, by repreſenting to you the inſufficiency of all other methods to preſerve peace and unity among chriſtians; and by ſhewing how proper mutual charity is to accompliſh this great and good end, and how effectually it would do it. After which, I ſhall exhort you to comply with the injunction of the apoſtle, "to put on charity," and ſhall offer a few directions in order to promote it.

That there are at preſent, and have been in all ages of the church, great variety of opinions, and different judgments, in matters of religion, is univerſally acknowledged. And ſo long as there is any obſcurity in any parts of divine revelation; ſo long as men will be fond of their own ſpeculations in diſputable points; ſo long as they are endued with different perſonal affections, conſtitutions, and capacities, or have different kinds of education, and more or leſs opportunities of ſearching after, and coming to the knowledge of the truth; ſo long it will be im-

ſo long it will be impoſſible to avoid different perſuaſions, and variety of judgments. It is manifeſt, from the precepts of the goſpel, and the injunctions of holy ſcripture, that the chriſtian religion is not grounded upon any ſuppoſition that it ſhould be otherwiſe. On the contrary, it inſtructs us how we ought to behave ourſelves towards each other in theſe circumſtances, "not to bite and devour one another," but to "walk with "all lowlineſs and meekneſs, with long-"ſuffering, forbearing one another in "love; endeavouring to keep the unity "of the ſpirit," notwithſtanding any diverſity of judgment, "in the bond of peace."

A difference in opinion being very conſiſtent with ſincerity and a love of truth, it may be on both ſides innocent and unavoidable; and conſequently ought not to make any breach in our brotherly love and chriſtian charity. And much leſs ought it to be the occaſion of hatred and animoſities, and of denying communion to one another; or of breaking the bonds of civil ſociety, by inflicting puniſhments upon each other, and, like the Jews and Samaritans, having

"no

"no dealings one with another." Theſe practices certainly are highly criminal, and ſuch as no pretences to a better underſtanding than our neighbours can juſtify.

If we enquire what methods have uſually been taken to prevent this diverſity of opinion among chriſtians, and theſe evil conſequences attending it; we ſhall find they have been chiefly theſe three that follow: all of them of human invention, and all of them fruitleſs and ineffectual.

One ſcheme for this end, has been to ſet up a magiſterial judge of controverſies, whoſe infallible judgment all private chriſtians muſt ſubmit to, and implicitly acquieſce in. The promoters of this expedient for unity among chriſtians, have been at a loſs to make it appear from ſcripture, that our Saviour Chriſt has actually conſtituted any ſuch judge upon earth; and upon this account they have very much differed among themſelves, where they ſhould place him; whether in the chair of a particular ſee, or at the head of a general council. And the reſult of all their arguments on this ſide the queſtion amounts to no more

than this, that they conclude there is ſuch a judge, becauſe in their opinion, it is highly fitting and neceſſary there ſhould be ſuch a one: miſtaking all along the nature of the chriſtian religion, as if it were neceſſary that every member of the catholic church ſhould agree in every particular opinion, or that there could be no other bond of unity without it.

Another ſcheme for this purpoſe, contrived by perſons who have thought the former both unwarrantable and inſufficient, has been, for ſome of the chief governors of the church to agree upon a ſet of principles, and have them eſtabliſhed as true doctrines by public authority; and then to require every member of the community, though perhaps not inwardly to believe them, yet to forbear either ſpeaking or writing againſt them.

Now this expedient, how well ſoever it may be calculated to preſerve peace among chriſtians, is built upon a foundation ſomewhat injurious to truth, which may upon this footing be forced to give way to groſs errors and abominable corruptions. For ſhould it pleaſe God to permit, either iniquity to be eſtabliſhed by a law, or the governors of Chriſt's church

church to be greatly and grievouſly miſtaken (which the ſupporters of this expedient muſt ſuppoſe poſſible, even upon their own principle, that there is no infallible authority in the church) ſuppoſing this caſe, I ſay, that error ſhould ever get the aſcendant over truth, what poſſible means would there be left to work a reformation? The profeſſors of true religion muſt by this means be kept ever under a cloud; and the cleareſt light, and the ſtrongeſt arguments, which truth itſelf can convey to the mind of man, muſt ſubmit to irreſiſtible authority. But ſurely that cannot be a proper expedient for peace, which is manifeſtly deſtructive of truth; and it muſt be to promote the intereſt of the father of lies, and the enemy of all righteouſneſs, to oblige men to make profeſſion of ſuch doctrines as true, which they believe in their conſciences to be otherwiſe.

There has been another ſcheme ſet on foot to preſerve unity in the church; but it is a ſcheme which no one but he who "was a murderer from the beginning" could have ſuggeſted, the deſtroy-

ing all thoſe who are of a different opinion from what ſhall be eſtabliſhed.

This indeed is a method, were it conſtantly and univerſally practiſed, that would effectually do the work; but then, at the ſame time, it would depopulate kingdoms, and lay waſte whole provinces, and perhaps in the end bid fair for the deſtruction of mankind. Hiſtory well informs us what tragical effects this principle has occaſioned in the chriſtian world.

But we have not ſo learned Chriſt, or been taught by ſuch inhuman arts as theſe, to propagate his goſpel, and enlarge his kingdom. He himſelf has taught us, that "the Son of man did not "come to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them;" and therefore we cannot but know "what manner of ſpirit ſuch perſons are "of," who are for "calling fire from heaven, to conſume" all thoſe who differ from them, and think the burning of heretics the propereſt method to reclaim them.

Thus every expedient of this kind, which human invention has found out for the uniting of chriſtians, has proved either

either inſufficient in itſelf, injurious to truth, or deſtructive of the happineſs and comfort of mankind in civil ſociety; upon which account we may ſafely conclude, that all, and each of them, are utterly inconſiſtent with the divine will. Which brings me to conſider, in the next place, what Chriſt and his apoſtles have directed to this purpoſe; or to ſhew how proper mutual charity is to accompliſh this great and good end, and how effectually it would do it.

Were this principle of charity, as it ought to be, fixed deeply in the heart of every chriſtian, what happy conſequences might be expected! There is indeed one thing, of ſo odious and frightful a nature, that charity itſelf ought not to be reconciled to, and that is, ſin; practices that are directly contrary to the plain precepts of the goſpel, and the injunctions of our bleſſed Saviour. There muſt be "no fellowſhip of righteouſneſs "with unrighteouſneſs, or communion "of light with darkneſs." But as for differences in opinion, theſe may be brought within the reach of our mutual charity, and may be either healed, or overlooked, by our forbearing one another

in love. Variety of judgments is not of that conſequence, as that we ſhould raiſe animoſities about it, and put odious marks of diſtinction upon each other, or avoid each other's ſociety and communion, "living in malice, and envy, "hateful, and hating one another." There can be no argument drawn, barely from a difference of opinion, to juſtify theſe proceedings; and therefore it is our common duty to let charity put an end to them. They muſt be of a very malignant nature, if ſo ſovereign a remedy as this cannot ſtop the diſorder; for hear how far the apoſtle extends it; "Charity "ſuffereth long, and is kind; charity "envieth not: charity vaunteth not it-"ſelf; is not puffed up; doth not be-"have itſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her "own; is not eaſily provoked, thinketh "no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but "rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all "things, believeth all things, hopeth all "things, endureth all things." Now what diſputable opinions are there to be met with amongſt chriſtians, but what may, upon this extenſive principle of charity be tolerated and born with? Every thought which is conſiſtent with

ſincerity

ſincerity and virtue, is conſiſtent with the liberty of the chriſtian religion; and ought not therefore to expoſe the perſon in whoſe breaſt it is found, either to inward hatred, or outward puniſhment.

Thus mutual charity, and that alone, is comprehenſive enough to unite the differing ſentiments of chriſtian brethren. And ſince it is impoſſible that all their thoughts ſhould exactly run in the ſame channel, it will appear that this is the moſt fit and proper bond of unity if we reflect,

Firſt, That no man can help his own opinion, or ſo command his own judgment, as to think what he pleaſes. For the underſtanding follows not the will, but the will the underſtanding. Our conceptions of things will be ſuch as the evidences of them appear to us, and as our capacities can receive them; and therefore the man, who, in the utmoſt ſincerity of his ſoul, uſes all the means in his power to inform his judgment aright, as to the truth of things, cannot poſſibly incur any guilt, however his thoughts may happen to be determined: for what can human abilities do more? Such a man's conſcience muſt be inno-

cent, however his judgment may be miſtaken. How reaſonable then muſt it be for the affections of brethren to be united in charity, when their different apprehenſions of things may be on both ſides unavoidable! How abſurd an attempt it is, to force a belief of truth! and how wicked a practice, to puniſh involuntary error!

But farther; It is highly fit and reaſonable, that charity ſhould be extended towards ſuch of our brethren whoſe opinions differ from our own, becauſe it is poſſible they may be in the right, and we may be in the wrong. This argument, indeed, will loſe its force upon ſuch chriſtians, who pleaſe themſelves with a fancy, that they have infallibility on their ſide. There is no arguing upon that ſuppoſition. But to perſons who are perſuaded, that all human judgment is liable to error, it muſt appear in its full ſtrength; and will preſs hard for charity towards others, if it meets but with a tolerable degree of modeſty and humility in ourſelves. If we will not ſuffer other men's thoughts to run as freely as our own, we ſhall be as likely to eſtabliſh error, as ſet up truth; and may, poſſibly,

bly, in our zeal againſt the powers of darkneſs, be in reality found to fight againſt God.

Again; Charity is a debt due to our brethren who differ from us, though we are ever ſo certain of their being in the wrong; becauſe the bare opinions of others can never hurt us. We can receive no damage, either in our temporal or ſpiritual concerns, from the miſtaken ſpeculations of other men, in points of religion. If any practical ill conſequences flow from them, which would affect the welfare of civil ſociety, it is the buſineſs of good goverment to prevent them; but religious opinions, as ſuch, affect none but the perſons who conceive them; who alone are to anſwer to God for the regularity and ſincerity of them. "Who art thou," therefore, "that judgeſt another man's ſervant?" ſays the apoſtle; "to his own maſter he ſtandeth or falleth." It is our own faith, and good lives, that we are anſwerable for, and which muſt juſtify us before God: and we ought, both in juſtice and charity, to leave others to their own prudence and conduct in the management of their ſpiritual concerns.

Thus reaſonable is it, that charity ſhould do, and thus it effectually would do, what force and violence never can, namely, unite the hearts and affections of chriſtian brethren, whoſe perſuaſions happen to be different in ſpeculative points of religion. And we may truly ſay, agreeably to the apoſtle in the text, as well as to the whole ſcheme and main principles of our holy religion, that *that* is the moſt perfect community of chriſtians, not which makes a rigid profeſſion of the trueſt doctrinal ſyſtem, but which has the moſt extenſive charity towards their fellow chriſtians of different perſuaſions. Let me therefore take the liberty, in the laſt place, to exhort all that are here preſent, to comply with the apoſtle's injunction in the text, and put on charity.

I might make uſe of many topics of perſuaſion to exhort you to this duty of "putting on charity;" but I ſhall chuſe to recommend this chriſtian diſpoſition towards ſuch who differ in their opinions from us, by leaving upon your thoughts theſe two principal conſiderations:

Firſt,

First, that leaving mankind to a free and unreſtrained liberty in the framing of their judgments and opinions of things, would be of great ſervice to the intereſt of truth, and the purity of the chriſtian religion. It is error only and miſtake, that is afraid of a full and impartial examination. It muſt be for the advantage of truth, to appear in as much light as poſſible. It wants nothing but a fair field to make its defence, and to crown itſelf with victory. Whereas when a man finds, in his purſuit of truth, that unleſs his thoughts are confined to the beaten road, he ſhall be expoſed to ſhame, or hatred, or puniſhment from other men; this will be very apt to biaſs his underſtanding, and miſlead his judgment; it will make him ſhy of evidence, and afraid of better light; and in points of religion, will deſtroy his ſincerity, and with it the ſolid peace and comfort of his mind.

Again as a univerſal charity amongſt brethren, whoſe opinions differ from each other, would be highly advantageous to truth, ſo would it effectually ſecure the peace and quiet of civil ſociety: which is another conſideration proper to recom-

recommend it. It is not the diverſity of men's opinions, in matters of religion, that has been, in itſelf, the occaſion of that diſtraction and confuſion which the chriſtian world has hitherto groaned under; but it has been the manner of treating men's perſons without charity, and without mercy, upon this account, that has cauſed theſe diſorders. On the contrary, let but a foundation be laid of ſecurity to men, that they ſhall not be ſufferers in their temporal concerns, upon account of their religious perſuaſions, and there will be an end at once of all theſe diſturbances. This would unite men in love and affection, promote good neighbourhood, and take away all ſtrife about ſuperiority and pre-eminence.

Let every chriſtian therefore, both as he regards the intereſts of true religion, and the welfare of civil ſociety, "put on charity himſelf," and uſe his utmoſt endeavours in his proper ſtation, to inſtil the ſame good principle into others; that differences in opinion among brethren may no longer divide their affections, or cauſe them to treat each other as enemies.

For

For this purpoſe, let us engage in our enquiries after truth with ſimplicity of mind, and not ſuffer corrupt paſſions or intereſts to intermix themſelves in theſe debates. If a love of truth had been the only motive which had carried men into religious controverſies, it is probable the world would have been much leſs troubled with them than it has been. But ſecular intereſts and worldly views have been carried on under this pretence, and have been the true and real occaſion of theſe contentions. It would be an eaſy matter to forbear and forgive the different perſuaſions of others; but it is their interfering with us in matters of another nature that gives birth to our quarrels, widens our breaches, and inflames our paſſions. We find it turns to our own account, to keep others in diſrepute; and this ſpurs us on to render their character odious, and to give them no quarter. Either we are addicted to ſome party, whoſe intereſt, right or wrong, muſt be promoted; or our credit is concerned to maintain ſome tenets we have eſpouſed; or perhaps we wiſh to be revenged of ſome perſon, or perſons, who have been the occaſion of our receiving

ceiving ſome diſappointment or diſadvantage. Theſe baſe and ſordid ends are but too often at the bottom of our diſputes. And therefore, till we can diveſt our minds of them, we muſt expect to be always wrangling, and never at peace with each other.

Finally; Let us always remember that the great and principal thing the goſpel requires, is not ſpeculation, but practice; that it does not aim ſo much at the rectifying of our opinions, as the regulating our manners. How little emulation is there ſeen among chriſtians, who ſhall moſt excel in virtuous actions? When do we vie with each other, who ſhall lead the beſt life? Yet this is the indiſpenſable duty of every chriſtian, and what is plainly revealed, and abſolutely neceſſary to our ſalvation. But diſputable opinions are of ſuch a nature, that honeſt men and good chriſtians may have their judgments determined on either ſide of the queſtion, and yet ſtill retain their integrity, and be entitled to the favour of God. Let us therefore for the future fix religion upon its true foundation, and place it in the heart, more than the head. And when our ſouls are ſeaſoned with true

true and inward piety, our affections will be enlarged towards our brethren, and our charity extended to the whole creation of God. We ſhall then caſt off all narrowneſs of ſpirit, which cramps our thoughts, and confines our underſtandings to the particular ſyſtems of this or that ſect and party of chriſtians; and we ſhall need no other recommendation of any one to our ſincere love and cordial affection, than his having the image of God ſtamped upon him.

Thus, and thus only, can we hope to ſee primitive chriſtianity reſtored among us, when peace, and love, and unity amongſt themſelves, diſtinguiſhed chriſtians, from the reſt of the world. And thus may we haſten the accompliſhment of thoſe predictions in which perfect tranquility is promiſed to the church of Chriſt; when "Ephraim ſhall not envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim;" when there ſhall be no hurting, or deſtroying in all God's holy mountain. Which peaceable and happy ſtate of chriſtianity, may God, in his wiſdom, eſtabliſh among us. Amen.

SER-

SERMON IV.

TRUST IN GOD THE BEST SUPPORT UNDER AFFLICTION.

PSALM xlii. 11.

Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? and why art thou diſquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I ſhall yet praiſe him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

IN theſe words are contained this comfortable doctrine, that in all our troubles, be they ever ſo great, under all diſturbances of mind, from whence ſoever they

they ariſe, a firm truſt in God is our beſt ſupport.

Innumerable are the evils to which we are ſubject in this life, from which neither the wiſdom of the moſt prudent, nor the riches of the moſt wealthy, the forces of the moſt powerful, nor even the virtues of the moſt innocent can always ſecure them. Even truſt in God itſelf, which is the beſt remedy againſt all evils, will not abſolutely ſecure us from afflictions. God is pleaſed ſometimes to viſit his moſt faithful ſervants with them for the trial of their patience, for the exerciſe of their virtues, and for the increaſe of their glory. When therefore truſt in God is here preſcribed as a remedy againſt dejection of mind under thoſe evils which we actually ſuffer, or againſt diſquieting thoughts that ariſe from the apprehenſion of evils which are likely to befal us, we muſt not flatter ourſelves that by placing our confidence in him we ſhall certainly and conſtantly be delivered from all thoſe calamities which we feel or fear; it is ground ſufficient for our truſting in him, that by ſo doing we ſhall either be freed from them, or ſupported under them; that they ſhall either be

be quite removed, or elſe be made tolerable to us; that either the thorn ſhall depart from us, or its ſharpneſs ſhall be blunted, and its pungency abated. With reſpect to ſuch a truſt in God as this, we have firm grounds, on which it may be built; from the attributes of God, which enable and diſpoſe him to help us; from the examples of thoſe who have thus put their truſt in him, and found help in the time of need; and, from the experience which we ourſelves have had of God's loving-kindneſs to us, which ſhould encourage us ſtill to put our truſt in him.

Firſt; We have firm grounds for our truſt in God from thoſe attributes which enable and diſpoſe him to help us.

We can no where ſecurely place our confidence, we can no where with any infallible certainty depend on any one for help, but where we are ſure that he on whom we depend is cloathed with ſufficient power, ſo that he is able to help us if he pleaſes; that he is gracious and beneficent, ſo as to be willing to extend to us that help which he is able to afford; and that if he has given us any promiſes of aſſiſtance, he is faithful and true, ſo that we may ſafely rely on thoſe pro-

promiſes. For, be our friend and patron on whom we depend ever ſo well inclined towards us, yet if he be weak and deſtitute of power to remove the evil which we ſuffer, or to procure us the good which we want, we may indeed be obliged to him for his good will, but we can receive no benefit from it, for want of ability to accompliſh his gracious purpoſes towards us. Or be his power to aſſiſt us ever ſo great, be he ever ſo able to deliver us from thoſe calamities under which we labour, or to beſtow upon us thoſe advantages which we ſtand in need of, it is no comfort to us that he can do what we have no reaſon to expect he will do for us. Or though he ſhould have been ſo kind as freely to have promiſed us what he is able alſo to perform, yet unleſs he be of unqueſtionable veracity, we may find ourſelves greatly diſappointed by relying on promiſes, which will never be made good to us. But when we place our truſt in God, we run none of theſe riſques; becauſe there is nothing which infinite power cannot accompliſh: nothing fit and expedient for us, which infinite goodneſs is not diſpoſed to grant; no promiſes of help can

have

have been made us by a God of truth and holineſs, which will not be exactly and punctually fulfilled.

When therefore the pſalmiſt would expreſs the firmneſs of that truſt, which he had in God, we find him ſometimes extolling his power, at other times magnifying his goodneſs, and often alſo mentioning his veracity, and building his hopes on theſe ſeveral grounds, as upon ſo many ſtrong foundations, which could not poſſibly be removed. There is nothing which either nature has made, or art has contrived, in ſuch a manner as may beſt ſerve for our defence, from which the pſalmiſt doth not borrow alluſions in order to excite in his own mind, and in the minds of others, a lively ſenſe of the mighty power of God to defend his ſervants in the time of trouble. "The Lord is "my rock, and my fortreſs, and my de- "liverer; my God, my ſtrength in whom "I will truſt, my buckler, and the horn "of my ſalvation, and my high tow- "er." When he conſidered the number and the power of thoſe enemies, with whom he was to contend, he had reaſon to be diffident of himſelf; but when he contemplated the far ſuperior ſtrength of his

his protector, all his fears were immediately diſcarded: "The Lord is my light, "and my ſalvation, whom ſhall I fear? "The Lord is the ſtrength of my life, "of whom ſhall I be afraid? Though "an hoſt ſhould encamp againſt me, my "heart ſhall not fear; though war ſhould "riſe againſt me, in this will I be confi-"dent." Having God on his ſide, he looked upon himſelf as able to withſtand the united powers of the world; "all "nations compaſſed me about, but in "the name of the Lord will I deſtroy "them." This his confidence he repeats in a very triumphant manner: "they "compaſſed me about, yea, they com-"paſſed me about; but in the name of "the Lord will I deſtroy them." So firm a reliance had he on God's power and aſſiſtance, that before he engaged his enemies he ſpoke of victory as already gained; "they compaſſed me about like bees, "they are quenched as the fire of thorns: "for in the name of the Lord I will de-"ſtroy them."

Nor did he think the power of God leſs able to relieve him in all other difficulties, than it was to ſecure him againſt the violence of his enemies. There

was no calamity of any kind, from which he did not expect deliverance, or under which he did not promiſe himſelf ſupport, through the protection of the Almighty. "Surely he ſhall deliver thee "from the ſnare of the fowler, and from "the noiſome peſtilence. Becauſe thou "haſt made the Lord, which is my re-"fuge, even the moſt high, thy habita-"tion; there ſhall no evil befall thee, "neither ſhall any plague come nigh thy "dwelling; for he ſhall give his angels "charge over thee, to keep thee in all "thy ways: they ſhall bear thee up in "their hands, leſt thou daſh thy foot a-"gainſt a ſtone. Thou ſhalt tread upon "the lion, and adder; the young lion "and dragon ſhalt thou trample under "feet."

But in order to our placing all our hopes in God, it is not enough that we ſhould have exalted notions of his power; we muſt alſo entertain undoubted aſſurances of his goodneſs, and readineſs to ſave us. And as the Pſalmiſt hath furniſhed us with many declarations of his almighty power, he hath likewiſe deſcribed, in the moſt forcible and animated language, his unbounded goodneſs towards thoſe

who put their truſt in him. "The Lord is good, and doth good;" he is eſſentially and immutably good; and his goodneſs, which is perpetually inherent in his nature, doth conſtantly iſſue forth in ſtreams of bounty towards his creatures; as he is good, ſo alſo he doth good. Nor is this his goodneſs limited to a few of his creatures, but extended to all; "he is good to all, and his "tender mercies are over all his works." Nor is it temporary, ſo that, though at ſome times we might hope to experience it, yet at other times we ſhould deſpair thereof: "for the goodneſs of God endureth continually." Thoſe who have taken moſt care to approve themſelves unto God by the ſanctity of their lives, have the greateſt encouragement to depend on his goodneſs to them: for ſuch as theſe "he preventeth with the "bleſſings of his goodneſs; and no good "thing will he withhold from them that "walk uprightly." But neither have the greateſt ſinners any reaſon utterly to deſpond if they repent of their ſins, and return unto God; "for thou, Lord, "art good, and ready to forgive; and

"plente-

" plenteous in mercy unto all them that " call upon thee."

Such being the goodneſs of God, to his nature ſo eſſential, in its exerciſe ſo free, in its meaſure ſo ample, in its objects ſo extenſive, in its continuance ſo laſting; we may upon this, as upon another ſtrong pillar, that will aſſuredly bear all the weight that can be laid upon it, ſecurely build our truſt in God. But that our confidence in him may be ſtill the ſtronger, we have alſo the ſure promiſes of God wherewith to fortify our hopes. And indeed theſe are at laſt the beſt grounds that we have to ſupport in us a regular and rational truſt; for truſt doth in the very notion of it ſuppoſe antecedent promiſe. We may deſire, we may expect, we may hope for unpromiſed favours; but we can be infallibly ſure of no bleſſings, but what God has graciouſly promiſed; and, according as his promiſes are either abſolute or conditional, ſo muſt our expectations be, if we would have them never diſſappointed. What is no where promiſed, that we may not flatter ourſelves with the hope of receiving; what he has promiſed to ſome perſons with certain qualifications,

and upon certain terms, that we muſt not raſhly preſume will be our lot, unleſs we have the qualifications required, unleſs we comply with the terms inſiſted on; but where the promiſes are general, ſo that none are excluded, or where we have fulfilled the conditions, ſo that we in particular are not ſhut out, there we cannot be too ſanguine in our hopes.

Now there are very expreſs promiſes of help to thoſe who are righteous, and who put their truſt in God; and on theſe promiſes all, whoſe conſciences bear them teſtimony that they are righteous, and that they place their whole confidence in him, may ſecurely depend. "The "eyes of the Lord are upon the righte- "ous, and his ears are open unto their "cry. The righteous cry, and the Lord "heareth, and delivereth them out of "all their troubles. Many are the afflicti- "ons of the righteous, but the Lord de- "livereth him out of them all. The "Lord redeemeth the ſoul of his ſervants, "and none of them that truſt in him ſhall "be deſolate. They that truſt in the "Lord ſhall be as mount Zion, which "cannot be removed, but abideth for e- "ver. As the mountains are round a-

"bout

" bout Jeruſalem, ſo the Lord is round " about his people, from henceforth even " for ever." Having therefore theſe gracious promiſes, we may with undaunted courage adopt the language, and take up the reſolution of the Pſalmiſt; " God is " our refuge and ſtrength, a very preſent " help in trouble: therefore will we not " fear, though the earth be removed, " and though the mountains be carried " into the midſt of the ſea: though the " waters thereof roar and be troubled; " though the mountains ſhake with the " ſwelling thereof. The Lord of hoſts " is with us, the God of Jacob is our " refuge." Thus have I ſhewn how we may from the attributes of God, which enable and diſpoſe him to help us, draw ſtrong and undeniable arguments, why in all our troubles and diſtreſſes we ſhould put our truſt in him. For the ſtrengthning of which truſt, it will be proper for us, in the

Second place, to direct our attention to the examples of thoſe who have thus placed their truſt in God, and have found help in the time of need.

Now out of the many bright patterns of this kind, with which the ſacred hiſ-

tory abounds, I ſhall ſelect only one, becauſe that one is in the ſcriptures themſelves expreſsly propoſed to us as a pattern. Wonderful is that inſtance of an unſhaken confidence in God, which is diſplayed for our inſtruction, and recorded for our imitation, in the hiſtory of the ſufferings and of the patience of Job. He ſaw himſelf at once ſtript of all the comforts and of all the neceſſaries of life, reduced from a ſtate of great plenty and abundance to extreme want, and bereft of a numerous family of children, all ſnatched away at once by a violent and untimely death: the enemy of mankind having permiſſion from God to ſhoot his arrows againſt him, emptied upon him his whole quiver. But whilſt he was armed with truſt in God, as with a ſtrong ſhield of defence, they could none of them pierce his heart, but were beaten back without doing him any hurt, as having no power over one, whom a firm reliance on the divine power and goodneſs had made invulnerable. What one circumſtance was there in his ſufferings, that did not add to their weight, and ſeem to make the burden of them utterly inſupportable? How ſenſibly, for inſtance,

inſtance, are tender parents wont to be afflicted with the loſs of one beloved child! How is their grief heightned, if this child be ſnatched away by a ſudden ſtroke! How much more exceſſive doth it ſtill grow, if the death, by which it is hurried out of the world, be not only ſudden, but alſo violent! But this holy man loſt not one only child, but all his children; all together, in one and the ſame hour, by one and the ſame calamity, were involved in the ſame common ruin. Had ſome been taken, and others left; had ſome died, and others eſcaped, he might have found comfort in his ſorrow for thoſe whom he had loſt, from the enjoyment of thoſe, who by the mercy of God did ſtill ſurvive. But when all fell together, when he was in a moment, from the happieſt of fathers become utterly childleſs, how wretched, how forlorn muſt his condition be! Or had there been a long interval between the loſſes, which he ſuffered; had he had time to have recollected his thoughts, when one calamity came, and to have worn off that ſorrow which it had cauſed, before another evil overtook him, and raiſed in his ſoul a freſh diſquiet, he might

have been able to have coped with theſe his afflictions one by one, and to have born up manfully againſt them, whilſt they attacked him ſingly. But when one came immediately after another; when before there was any time for the healing of former wounds, freſh wounds were inflicted; when thoſe calamities, which ſeverally and apart were ſufficient to overwhelm an ordinary courage, did all jointly and together fall upon him, it might well be expected, that they would preſs him down, and that he would quite ſink under a burden ſo grievous and inſupportable. How great therefore muſt his courage be, how exemplary his patience, how unſhaken his truſt in God, who in the midſt of ſo many and ſore afflictions did not deſpond; who was ſo far from complaining againſt providence, or charging God fooliſhly, or withdrawing his confidence in him, that he broke out into expreſſions of gratitude and thankſgiving; "the Lord gave, "and the Lord hath taken away; bleſ-"ſed be the name of the Lord!" Though the Lord had taken away, yet this was no reaſon of diſtruſt, becauſe the ſame Lord had given; and he who had before given,

given, could again give: it was of his infinite goodneſs that he had once given, and the ſame goodneſs would diſpoſe him again to give. God had given to him freely and plentifully, before he had an occaſion or opportunity of expreſſing his firm dependance upon him; and ſince he had now, in ſo ſignal a manner, ſhewn that his truſt in God was built on ſuch ſtrong foundations, that no afflictions could overbear it, none could ſo much as weaken it, he had the greater reaſon to hope that God would recompenſe him for this his ſteady faith; and that as he now bleſſed his holy name, when he ſtretched forth his hand in diſpleaſure to take away, ſo he ſhould have occaſion hereafter to pour forth his praiſes, when God in his mercy ſhould reach out his hand to give back what he had taken, and to compenſate his loſſes by an abundance of mercies. Nor were theſe his hopes defeated, or this his exemplary truſt in God unrewarded; for we are by the ſacred hiſtory informed, that "the "Lord gave Job twice as much as he "had before," and that "the Lord bleſ- "ſed the latter end of Job more than his "beginning."

When therefore we find our ſpirits begin to droop under the ſenſe of any affliction, which falls upon us; when pains of body, or loſſes of eſtate, or the death of relations or friends fill us with anxiety and ſorrow; when our patience begins to be tired with ſufferings, which are greater than we can well bear; let us enliven our fainting courage by ſetting before us ſuch noble patterns as theſe; let us dwell upon them, till we find a generous emulation kindling in our breaſts; and let us be aſhamed to ſink under burdens, in their weight far diſproportioned to thoſe which men made of the ſame fleſh and blood as we are, and ſupported by no other helps than are afforded to us, have without murmuring againſt God, without leſſening their confidence in him, without impeaching his juſtice, and without deſpairing of his goodneſs, both patiently endured, and triumphantly overcome. But becauſe foreign examples do not ſo nearly affect us, as thoſe which have fallen within our own obſervation, and becauſe there is no room to doubt of what our own experience hath taught us, let us, in the

Third

Third place, endeavour to ſtrengthen our reliance upon God, from the experience we ourſelves have had of his former loving-kindneſs towards us.

To God we owe our being, and thoſe bleſſings, which we either now do, or ever did enjoy. There are many calamities incident to men, which we have, through the goodneſs of God, eſcaped; many, which were ready to fall upon our heads, and which we ſaw no poſſible way of avoiding, God has by his wonderful providence averted from us; many more doubtleſs there have been to which we were expoſed, but did not ſo much as know our danger; ſo that we were free not only from the pain, but which is a ſtill greater mercy, from the fear of them; many, which after they had ſeized us, and began to preſs us beyond our ſtrength, God did at firſt abate, and afterwards wholly remove; many, which have by God's over-ruling power been turned to our good, ſo that we have reaſon to rejoice, that we were viſited with them. Have we never been by a painful and lingring ſickneſs brought to the very brink of the grave, and when all the methods of recovery have been in

vain tried, when medicines have failed, and phyſicians have paſt the ſentence of death upon us, have we not been, by ſome unexpected turn, ſome inviſible alteration, at laſt reſtored? Has our good name never been aſperſed by any foul and baſe ſlander, under which we have long lain without being able to clear it? and has not God, by his good providence, "brought "forth our righteouſneſs as the light, "and our innocence as the noon-day?" Have we never ſeen poverty coming upon us as an armed man, when on a ſudden God has raiſed us up unhoped for benefactors to relieve us, or ſtruck out for us unforeſeen means of ſubſiſtence?

If we have had any ſuch experience of the goodneſs of God to us, as certainly we have had, and, unleſs we have been very careleſs obſervers of his providence, muſt have taken notice of, we may from this ſenſe of God's paſt mercies to us draw this comfortable concluſion, that he will ſtill be merciful: "he who hath de-"livered us from ſo great dangers, and "doth deliver, in him we may ſafely "truſt, that he will yet deliver us. Is "the Lord's hand," that has been ſo often ſtretched forth for our help,

"ſhortned,

" ſhortned, that it cannot ſave? " Or " is his ear, " that has been ſo often opened to our prayers, grown " heavy, " that it can no more hear?" Are we like the perverſe Iſraelites, who argued after this wicked and abſurd manner; " Behold, he ſmote the rock, that the " waters guſhed out, and the ſtreams o- " verflowed; but can he give bread al- " ſo, or provide fleſh for his people?" Can there be any thing imagined more ridiculous, or more provoking, than for men with the ſame breath to own God's power, and to expreſs their diſtruſt of it; to ſpeak of mercies which they have actually received from him, and to doubt whether he is able to beſtow upon them the like mercies? Ought we not with holy David to be mindful of God's former mercies, and to be aſſured from thence of his future goodneſs towards us? Ought we not in our preſent diſtreſſes to betake ourſelves to him, whom we have found a gracious and ready helper in paſt troubles? Ought we not with the pious Pſalmiſt devoutly and thankfully to ſay: " Thou haſt been " a ſhelter for me, and a ſtrong tower: " I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever; " I will

"I will truſt in the covert of thy wings."

Let us therefore, under all the pains of body and anxieties of mind, under all the frowns of fortune and difficulties of life, under all the evils which have befallen us, and all the apprehenſions of evils which we fear may befal us, under all our loſſes and all our wants, under all the uncertain proſpects which we may have for ourſelves, or for our families, when all worldly comforts fail us, when we look out for aid, but there is none to help us, when our hearts begin to fail us, when they are ready to ſink under the load, and we find ourſelves in danger of being quite overwhelmed with deſpair; let us check ourſelves with this comfortable reflection; that the more diſtreſſed our condition is, the more proper occaſion doth it adminiſter to us of exerciſing our faith, and repoſing our truſt in God. Let us rouſe our drooping ſpirits by ſaying, "Why art thou caſt down. O my ſoul, "and why art thou diſquieted within me?" Truſt thou in God, who has power to help and ſupport thee under the greateſt weakneſſes, and to reſcue thee out of the greateſt difficulties, and to comfort thee under the greateſt diſtreſſes:

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truſt thou in God, who loves thee, as well as thou canſt love thyſelf; who hath compaſſion upon the miſerable; who "is "faithful, and will not ſuffer thee to be "tempted above that thou art able; but "will with the temptation alſo make a "way to eſcape, or enable thee to bear "it:" truſt thou in God, who has promiſed that none who truſt in him ſhall be forſaken, and who "is not a man, that he "ſhould lie, neither the ſon of man, that "he ſhould repent;" but who is "faith-"ful and true, and all whoſe promiſes "are yea and amen:" truſt thou in God in whom the righteous of all ages have truſted, and have been delivered; to whom they have cried, and have been heard: truſt thou in God, in whom thou haſt formerly truſted, and waſt not confounded; who has delivered thee in ſix troubles, and on whom therefore thou haſt reaſon to depend, that in the ſeventh he will not forſake thee.

If thou doſt thus put thy truſt in God, thou ſhalt praiſe him for the comfort which thou ſhalt find by thus putting thy truſt in him; thou ſhalt praiſe him for thoſe deliverances, which he

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ſhall work out for thee, and for thoſe bleſſings, both temporal and ſpiritual, which he ſhall confer upon thee; thou ſhalt praiſe him here in the private retirements of the cloſet, and in the public congregation of the ſaints; and thou ſhalt praiſe him hereafter with angels and archangels, when " thy light afflictions, " which were but for a moment, ſhall " have wrought for thee a far more ex- " ceeding and eternal weight of glory."

SER-

SERMON V.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE x. 36, 37.

Which now of theſe three, thinkeſt thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he ſaid, he that ſhewed mercy on him. Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, go, and do thou likewiſe.

THESE words are the concluſion of an excellent parable of our Saviour, the ſeveral circumſtances of which are very well known. But for the clear-

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er underſtanding them, and placing them in a more ſtriking point of view, it will be neceſſary to premiſe ſomewhat concerning the deſign and occaſion of the parable. Now the occaſion of it was this: a certain lawyer of the Jews, hearing that our Saviour profeſſed to teach the way to eternal life, applies himſelf to him, with the important queſtion, "what ſhould he do to inherit it:" but this he did, as it ſeems, more out of curioſity, or a captious deſign to entrap him in his anſwer, than from a ſerious and ingenuous deſire to be inſtructed; for he was in hopes, that, if his anſwer had contained any thing contrary to the law of Moſes, he ſhould have had ſufficient ground of accuſation againſt him. But our Saviour defeated his malicious intentions, by ſending him to the law of Moſes for his anſwer; "For he ſaid unto him, what is written "in the law? how readeſt thou? And "he anſwering ſaid, thou ſhalt love the "Lord thy God with all thy heart, and "with all thy ſoul, and with all thy "ſtrength, and with all thy mind; and "thy neighbour as thyſelf. And our "Saviour ſaid unto him, thou haſt an-"ſwered right: this do, and thou ſhalt "live.

" live. But the lawyer, willing to juſtify " himſelf," aſks farther, who is my neighbour? How far the meaning of that word extended? Whether, according to the Jewiſh notion, it was to be confined within their own kindred, or nation, or religion; or whether in a larger ſignification (which the lawyer, it is probable, little expected) it comprehended a general and undiſtinguiſhed regard for the good of all men. Now it was the deſign of our Saviour to convince the Jews that this laſt was the real meaning of the precept; and that the narrow and confined notion of theirs, that none was their neighbour who was not of their name, or nation, was contrary to all reaſon and humanity, and never intended by the law of Moſes; being a falſe and very injurious interpretation of their doctors. This, I think, was the deſign of the parable, to convince the Jews of their narrow and ungenerous notions; which were not the precepts of their law, but the inſincere and wicked interpretations of their teachers: who, had rendered the commandment of God of non effect; and, inſtead of a generous and benevolent principle, which was to be the foundation of

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univerſal love and charity amongſt men, had impoſed upon the deluded people one that was baſe and ſervile, and confined only within themſelves. But however mean and ſelfiſh this principle was, by working upon their ignorance and ſuperſtitious bigotry, their teachers had rooted it ſo deeply in their minds, that it required great addreſs and ſkill to inſpire them with better ſentiments. In our Saviour's time they appear to have been exceedingly tenacious of it; and to have contracted from thence (as it was natural) a high and arrogant opinion of themſelves, and a perfect contempt and abhorrence of all the world beſides; inſomuch that they looked upon it rather as an offence againſt their law, to do the common offices of humanity, or even to converſe upon the footing of common civility, with an heathen, or a ſtranger. It will be thought, therefore, a very neceſſary undertaking in our Saviour, (whoſe religion was to be quite of another ſpirit, being intended for the common and univerſal good of mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews) to endeavour to diveſt the minds of thoſe, whom he came to inſtruct, of ſuch low and abject notions; and that

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the queſtion which the lawyer here propoſed to him, was a fair opportunity for him to ſet about it. The uſe therefore which our Saviour makes of this opportunity, ſhall be the ſubject of the enſuing diſcourſe; which uſe will be beſt explained, by making ſome diſtinct obſervations upon the ſeveral circumſtances of this excellent parable.

Firſt; It is particularly worthy of our notice, that our Saviour puts the caſe, for their inſtruction, of the moſt miſerable and calamitous object he could ſuppoſe: it is that of an unfortunate man, who, as he was travelling from Jeruſalem to Jericho, fell among thieves; who, not content with ſpoiling him of every thing that was valuable, ſtripped him at laſt of his very raiment; and to compleat their barbarous outrage, wounded him, and left him half dead upon the place. This was the extreme diſtreſs of this poor man: and our Saviour ſeems purpoſely to have drawn it in this affecting manner, that he might inſpire the Jews with the ſtronger abhorrence of that vile principle, which could ſo far change the natural tempers of men, as to make them

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void of compaſſion towards an object ſo completely miſerable: for if any thing could have extorted compaſſion and aſſiſtance from them, the object before them certainly would. A caſe could hardly be imagined more diſtreſsful: and if their principles were ſuch as could ſteel their hearts, and ſhut up their bowels of compaſſion, when ſo much miſery called for their relief, there needed no other arguments to expoſe their baſeneſs and inhumanity. For thoſe principles muſt certainly be bad, (let them come ever ſo ſolemnly recommended under the notion of religion) which tend to extinguiſh in the minds of men the ſeeds of humanity, and to deſtroy their natural propenſions to charity and compaſſion. So that our Saviour very judiciouſly ſets this caſe before them, when he deſigned to give them true and generous ſentiments of beneficence and goodneſs. A caſe of no common misfortune; that he might, in the beginning, bias their minds in favour of his doctrine, ſhew them their own deformity in its ſtrongeſt colours, and lay them under a neceſſity of acknowledging, in the application, that whoever afforded relief to this diſtreſſed perſon, whatever were

were his nation and religion, was indeed his friend, and did perform the office of a neighbour to him.

The next thing worthy our remark is this, that our Saviour repreſents a prieſt and Levite, as both of them paſſing by, and purpoſely avoiding the miſerable object that lay before them; for thus he goes on: "By chance there came down "a certain prieſt that way; and when he "ſaw him, he paſſed by on the other "ſide: and likewike a levite, when he was "at the place, came and looked on him, "and paſſed by him on the other ſide." By which our Saviour would intimate to them, that notwithſtanding their boaſted principle of loving their neighbour, as commanded by the law of Moſes, they were very defective in it, even according to their own narrow interpretation: that there was more of pretence among them, than of a real and ſincere affection to one another; and though there was a mighty veneration expreſſed for the precept of Moſes in their words, there was but very little of it in their actions: for could there be a greater demonſtration of this, than to diſregard a brother, and to leave him deſtitute and forſaken, in ſuch terrible

rible diſtreſs? Or, could they have the leaſt ſpark of love and affection to their neighbour, or even of common humanity in them, who could with ſuch a cruel indifference leave a miſerable wretch half dead upon the road? And to intimate farther, that this want of charity was not the effect of ignorance, or the inhumanity only of ſome few vile and abandoned creatures, but had, in its general infection, corrupted the very beſt orders of men amongſt them; he repreſents a prieſt, as forgetful of his neceſſary duty, whoſe place and office call for a more than ordinary degree of holineſs and charity: and a Levite too, as unmoved on the ſame occaſion, by all the ties of tribe, of profeſſion, of religion. Now it is probable, theſe perſons might excuſe this their neglect by ſome ſuch pretences as theſe: that the place where the wounded traveller lay, might be full of danger to themſelves; and it might ſeem inconſiſtent with their own lives, or ſafety, to relieve him: or, that they were upon a haſty journey to Jeruſalem, to perform the miniſterial function (as it is an eaſy matter to find excuſes for the neglect of a duty which we have no inclination

clination to perform) but had they been actuated by a real ſpirit of love and charity, they would, like the Samaritan, have deſpiſed the danger; and might eaſily have excuſed their too late appearance at Jeruſalem, by appealing to the authority of him, who, in ſuch caſes as theſe, had determined the doubting conſcience, by declaring, "I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice." So that notwithſtanding their affected reverence for the precept of Moſes, even in their own ſenſe of it, it had almoſt loſt its force and influence among them: for we muſt believe that there was a very ſmall degree of mutual love and affection among a people, where there was occaſion for ſo ſevere a reprehenſion as is ſtrongly implied in this obſervation of our Saviour. It ſeems, matters were come to ſuch a paſs amongſt them, and the meaning of their excellent law was ſo little attended to, that the life of it was quite gone, and there remained only the ſhadow (and hardly that) of charity and good-nature: for even the prieſt and Levite here (of whom we might have expected better things) when they came to the place where this unhappy traveller lay ſtrip-

ped of his raiment, and wounded, and half-dead, only "looked on him, and paſſed by on the other ſide." They gave him a tranſient look, out of a vulgar and unconcerned curioſity, and might perhaps lend him a pitying eye, and a compaſſionate wiſh; but their vile ſelfiſhneſs and ſtupid indifference prevented their lending him an aſſiſting hand. Strange corruption of human nature! That ſo excellent a precept, given by God himſelf, to maintain and keep alive mutual affection and benevolence among men, ſhould prove the very means of ſtifling it; and the effect of God's commanding his people to love their neighbours as themſelves, ſhould be, firſt, confining it abſurdly to their own kindred and nation; and at laſt, in their practice, denying it even there.

Another circumſtance obſervable in the parable, and which ſhews the wiſdom of our Saviour, is his making uſe of the perſon of a Samaritan on this occaſion, to relieve the wounded man. For though the prieſt and Levite only looked on him, and paſſed by on the other ſide; yet, the parable tells us, that "a certain Samaritan, as he jour-"neyed, came where he was: and when "he

" he ſaw him, he had compaſſion on him, " and went to him, and bound up his " wounds, pouring in oil and wine." It was his deſign, in this parable, to explain the meaning of loving our neighbour in its full latitude and extent; and to convince the Jews, that it was not calculated for their uſe only, but for the benefit of men in general. If therefore he could once bring them to acknowledge, that the Samaritans themſelves were objects of their love and mercy, and comprehended within the meaning of the precept; there would be no difficulty in their admitting all the world beſides into the ſame ſhare of their regard: for the Samaritans were an abomination to the Jews; and there was a deadly and irreconcileable hatred between them. But now, in the caſe before them, love and regard for their own countryman would force them to acknowledge, that the Samaritan did a very commendable act of charity, in aſſiſting him, though a Jew, though a ſtranger, though an enemy to their name and nation. But had our Saviour put the caſe in other terms, had the wounded man been the Samaritan, and the diſtreſſed Jew in the

caſe of the compaſſionate reliever, it is poſſible, that the lawyer, upon the queſtion, inſtead of owning that he had done the office of a friend and neighbour, might have condemned him for a fooliſh officiouſneſs, and an unmanly weakneſs of temper, which had betrayed him into an action ſo unbecoming his name and character, as to aſſiſt a Samaritan, an enemy, a vile unclean perſon, and a ſtranger to their law and religion. Our Saviour, therefore, obviates this objection very wiſely, by relating the ſtory with ſuch circumſtances, that the lawyer, out of regard to his countryman, would be obliged to acknowledge that this ſtranger had performed a kind and good-natured action. And if ſo, then let him aſk himſelf the queſtion ſeriouſly, whether the application be not very natural, and the conſequence extremely juſt, that if the Samaritan did well in aſſiſting the Jew, the Jew under the ſame circumſtances would have acted as commendably in relieving an unfortunate Samaritan. The queſtion will admit of no other anſwer but the right one. For what the Samaritan did was in obedience to the law of nature, and out of a ſenſe

of

of the common obligations of humanity; which was a general, everlaſting law, not to be cancelled by any poſitive inſtitutions whatſoever; much leſs was it to be ſuperſeded and made of no effect, by a falſe and abſurd interpretation of a law, which did in truth enjoin the contrary. The lawyer here might have remembered (if prejudice had not ſtood in the way of ſuch reflection) that the advice of Moſes was, "That they ſhould love the ſtrang-"er, in giving him food and raiment; "for they were ſtrangers in the land of "Egypt."

Once more, give me leave to take notice of the kindneſs and generoſity of this Samaritan. As he journeyed, he found a poor traveller, ſtripped of his raiment, and wounded, and half dead. He was immediately affected with the object, and had compaſſion on him, and went to him: without conſidering the inconvenience and danger of the place, the neceſſity of his own affairs, or the perſon of the man who lay in theſe calamitous circumſtances. He "went to "him, and bound up his wounds, pour-"ing in oil and wine." Had he been leſs humane than he was, he might have

found reaſons plauſible enough, after having looked on him, to have paſſed by, and proſecuted his journey without farther notice. He might have pleaded with himſelf, and with ſome colour of prudence too, that the man, who lay before him, was unknown to him; and common diſcretion required, that he ought not to hazard his own life, to ſave that of a ſtranger. He might have argued farther, that though he did not know his perſon or his family, yet he ſaw he was a Jew, and therefore did not deſerve his compaſſion. For as there was no intercourſe with thoſe two people, but that of enmity and hatred, it is likely, that all the return that he ſhould meet with for his charity, would be that of malice and ingratitude. Nay, more than this, he was a ſworn enemy to his religion, and profeſſed a contemptuous opinion of the Samaritan worſhip, and of the temple of mount Gerizim: and therefore it muſt be inconſiſtent with a true zeal for the honour of God, and for Samaria, the place of his worſhip, if he ſhould condeſcend to relieve one, who was a declared enemy of their God, and of the true religion. This, I ſay, had been

been very plauſible arguing; and according to the common eſtimation of things, and in the meaſure in which men often deal their charity to one another, might have paſſed for very prudent and diſcreet conduct. But the Samaritan, we ſee, was of another ſpirit: the nobleneſs and beneficence of his generoſity was ſuch, that he was not to be diverted from his purpoſe of doing good, by any ſuch mean and ſelfiſh views. All that he conſidered was, the circumſtances of the perſon in neceſſity; and he needed no arguments to induce him to aſſiſt him, when he ſaw that he ſtood in need of his aſſiſtance. And to ſhew that he had an heart perfectly ſincere, and that his charity was founded in the real goodneſs of his principles and temper, without the leaſt allay of partiality or hypocriſy; our Saviour is very particular in laying before us the manner of his putting it in practice. As ſoon as he ſaw him, ſays he, he had compaſſion on him. Such was the humanity of his diſpoſition, that he was immediately affected: and his compaſſion did not evaporate in a vain, charitable wiſh; but he went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in

oil and wine. And when he had thus eaſed him of his pains, and brought him a little to himſelf, he ſet him on his own beaſt. He put himſelf to a real inconvenience, to help and accommodate this unhappy ſtranger; and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And here, one would have thought, his care might have ended, and he might reaſonbly have excuſed himſelf from any farther concern about him, when he had lodged him ſafely in his own country and among his own kindred: but, like a truly charitable perſon, he is uneaſy in deſiſting from a good work happily begun, till he has put his laſt hand to it, and rendered it complete: and therefore, on the morrow, when he departed, he gave to the hoſt money in hand, and an unlimited commiſſion for defraying any farther expences. Take care of him, ſays he; "and whatſoever "thou expendeſt more, when I come "again I will repay thee."

This was the engaging character, which the Jews were to endeavour to imitate. And we are not to wonder, if, in the application, after ſuch an amiable deſcription of it, when our Saviour puts the queſtion directly,

directly, "which now of these three, "thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him "that fell among the thieves?" we are not to wonder, I say, that, in spite of all his former prejudice, the Jew should answer, he that shewed mercy on him. Go then, said Jesus unto him, "Go, and do thou likewise." Go, and take along with you this plain lesson of instruction: you are a Jew, and your mind has been long inured to mean and narrow notions; but learn from this instance which I have given you of a truly beneficient temper, to correct your pride, and to enlarge your charity. You are sensibly touched with the beauty of the Samaritan's character, and feel a just indignation at the baseness and wickedness of the priest and Levite: imitate therefore in your practice, not the priest, or the Levite, but the good Samaritan: and to shew that you applaud his compassion to the Jew, do you, who are a Jew, the same good office to a stranger; or, if occasion requires it, even to a Samaritan. For the laws of nature are unchangeable; and you will in vain pretend that you love God, unless you love your brother, who is an image of him: "for if any man

" ſay, that he loves God, and hateth his " brother, he is a liar. For this com- " mandment have we from God, that he " who loveth God, ſhould love his bro- " ther alſo."

Thus much for the parable, the ſeveral circumſtances of which would very naturally admit of many reflections for our religious improvement. I ſhall only inſiſt upon the two following:

Firſt; Let us learn from this ſtory of our Saviour, not to judge of men and their religion ſo much by their faith, as by what they do; to conſider not ſo much whether their opinions are, in our particular judgment, right and ſound, as whether their actions are, in the judgment of all men, good and praiſe-worthy. The Jew here applies himſelf to our Saviour, to be informed who was his neighbour; that is, whom he was to eſteem in that near degree of relation to him, as to love him as himſelf. Our Saviour tells him very plainly, and makes him own it too, that, ſuppoſing himſelf in circumſtances of diſtreſs, it was that Samaritan who ſhould relieve him; for this Samaritan had an excellent ſpirit in him,

and

and it appeared from his mercy to this Jew, this ſtranger, this enemy to himſelf and his nation, that he underſtood the eſſential part of all religion, which was doing good. The prieſt and Levite had minds better informed; but though they underſtood religion, yet they would not practiſe it: and therefore this Samaritan, with all his miſtakes about him, was a better man, and for his goodneſs more worthy of eſteem and reverence, than theſe proud and peeviſh men, whoſe religion had not inſpired them with compaſſion enough to aſſiſt the miſerable.

Secondly; Let this parable farther inſtruct us, and let us always remember, that it is the temper of the religion we profeſs, to be univerſally good and beneficient. Under the chriſtian diſpenſation every wall of partition is demoliſhed; all the world is become one people, ſubject to the laws of one common Lord, and capable of the ſalvation promiſed by one common redeemer. The precepts of our religion, the pattern of the great author and finiſher of our faith, the examples of his holy apoſtles, all conſpire to

lead

lead us to the practice of universal love and charity. "As we have opportunity, "we are to do good to all men: we are "to abound in love one towards another, "and to all men: and ever to follow that "which is good, both among our selves, "and to all men." And nothing, perhaps, is more to the honour, or a greater evidence of the divinity, of our religion, than the generous and free spirit of its charity. True goodness is as unbounded as that God who is the author of it; and if we would imitate him in that perfection, we must study to wear off all littleness and contractedness of spirit; for partiality to men is a sanctuary to uncharitableness, and nothing better than a plausible excuse for pride and ill-nature. My business, if I will follow the precepts and examples of my Saviour, is to do good to all: and it matters not to me, if I can promote their happiness, whether they be acquaintance, or strangers, countrymen or foreigners, friends or enemies; of contrary persuasions, or even of bad characters. If they are men, they are for that reason objects of my notice and compassion. For though

though I muſt have reaſons to proportion and adjuſt my charity, I will admit of none which forbid it.

Upon theſe generous principles, and in this enlarged ſenſe, let us, as becomes diſciples of Chriſt, love our neighbour as ourſelves.

SER-

SERMON VI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION TO CIVIL SOCIETY.

GENESIS XX. xi.

And Abraham ſaid, becauſe I thought, ſurely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will ſlay me for my wife's ſake.

THAT the general belief and public acknowledgment of the great principles of religion, the being of a God, and a providence, are neceſſary to ſecure the

the order and happineſs of civil ſocieties; is an opinion, which has in all ages had the united ſuffrage of the thinking part of mankind. We find the advocates for religion, after having eſtabliſhed its truth, generally inſiſting on its importance to men's ſocial intereſts: and its very enemies have been forced to give us ſuch accounts of its origin and propogation, as plainly imply an acknowledgment, that the belief of its truth has always been thought neceſſary, to deceive mankind into a regard to order, and a participation of the benefits of ſociety.

The influence of religious principles on the morals and good order of ſociety, is ſtrongly implied in the reaſoning of the patriarch in the text. Abraham appears, from this hiſtory of him, to have been one of the moſt illuſtrious perſonages in ancient times. By ſojourning in ſeveral different countries, he had opportunities of making himſelf acquainted with the manners and ſentiments of ſeveral different kinds of people; and this too at a time when the condition of mankind approached much nearer, than it has ſince done, to a ſtate of nature.

And

And what was the reſult of the obſervations of a perſon ſo every way qualified to make them with advantage? Why, that the fear of God is the only effectual check upon the irregular paſſions of men; and that where any nation or people is ſuppoſed deſtitute of the influence of this principle, there is no immorality, no villainy, no barbarity, which may not juſtly be dreaded from them. This was the concluſion which the patriarch drew from his acquaintance with mankind. From this he reaſoned, and upon this he acted, as an unqueſtionable truth. "And "Abraham ſaid, becauſe I thought, ſure-"ly the fear of God is not in this place; "and they will ſlay me for my wife's "ſake."

It will not then ſeem foreign to the import of the text, if occaſion be taken from hence to repreſent the importance of religious principles to national virtue and happineſs.

This point might be illuſtrated two ways; by enquiring "whether, on the "ſuppoſition of no religion, there could "be, in reaſon, any proper obligation to

"moral

" moral virtue?" Or, " whether, on the " ſame ſuppoſition, there would be, in " fact, any effectual inducement to it?"

It will be to little purpoſe to conſider the point before us in the former view. Whatever be determined concerning the power of moral conſiderations, ſeparately from thoſe of religion; it is evident, the order and happineſs of ſocieties, as far as the natural tendency of things is concerned, is immediately affected by men's outward actions only. The moſt uſeful method of treating this point therefore ſeems to be, to enquire, not how men's internal obligations, but how their actual regard, to the rules of order and virtue, will be influenced by religion or by the want of it. The enquiry is by this means brought from the bar of abſtract reaſoning to the more obvious, and more convincing deciſion of fact and experience: and from conſidering, what has been hitherto obſerved concerning human nature, we ſhall be able to conclude with moſt aſſurance, what may hereafter and at all times in the ſame circumſtances be expected from it.

Man,

Man, conſidered in the views of mere philoſophy, may be allowed to be by nature endued with ſuch faculties as direct, and ſuch diſpoſitions as incline, him to aſſociate with thoſe of his own ſpecies; and to be, as by the former enabled, ſo by the latter excited, to promote the happineſs of ſuch aſſociations when made. But then it muſt be remembred, that theſe faculties, theſe diſpoſitions, as far as they are natural to man, are faculties and diſpoſitions only. To reduce them to acts there muſt be willingneſs and choice; but to improve them into habits, care and cultivation are farther neceſſary. And after all, ſhould our diſcerning faculties prove liable to be obſcured and perverted by powers of a different tendency; and our ſocial affections to be checked and reſtrained by others of a private nature: it is plain, if we ſit down contented with ſurveying only the bright ſide of human nature, and from contemplating what ſuch a creature may be, conclude what he generally will be; we ſhall frame a very partial conception concerning that nature, and may find ourſelves much diſappointed in our expectations from it.

The

The ſuppoſitions I have been here framing are by no means merely imaginary. Let us leave our ſpeculations, and follow man into common life, and we ſhall ſoon find each of them but too ſadly verified. The firſt apperance that will offer itſelf to our view, will probably be that of the moſt uſeful faculties weakened, and the moſt generous affections overpowered, by craving appetites, impetuous luſts and headſtrong paſſions; and (which is ſtill worſe) perverted, and rendered ſubſervient to purpoſes moſt prejudical to public welfare. The avarice and ambition of ſome, the peeviſhneſs and reſentfulneſs of others, the licentiouſneſs and intemperance of ſtill more, meeting with the like propenſities in other men, would ſoon, if permitted to operate according to their natural tendencies, render the world a ſcene of confuſion, diſtraction and deſolation. Man, when under the dominion of his paſſions, has ever been obſerved to be one of the moſt dangerous and deſtructive of creatures. Even thoſe very powers, which, when rightly applied, give him a juſt preeminence over the whole animal creation, ſerve only, under ſuch a perverſe

verſe management, to render him more artful in contriving, and more ſucceſsful in accompliſhing, the moſt miſchievous deſigns.

What is it then which, at preſent, reſtrains mankind from theſe ravages, and this deſtruction of each other? This is an enquiry about which thoſe perſons are particularly concerned to give us ſome ſatisfaction, who imagine they can ſufficiently provide for the government of the moral world (as ſome of their forefathers pretended to have done with regard to the natural) without taking into their ſchemes the belief of a God, and a Providence. And a variety of cauſes will, no doubt, be aſſigned for this purpoſe. Great ſtreſs will be laid on the powers of reaſon; greater ſtill on the more active principles of benevolence and public ſpirit; and others ſeem to expect mighty things from a ſenſe of honour: while thoſe who give us the moſt diſadvantageous accounts of human nature, refer us, for a ſufficient ſecurity of our perſons and properties, to the power of the civil magiſtrate. Let us ſee then, what might ordinarily be expected from any or all of theſe, ſhould we be prevailed

ed upon to part with (what we have been uſed to account the foundation and ſupport of each of them) the "Fear of God."

Reaſon, as far as it is a part of our nature, is (as has been already intimated) a faculty only; and muſt, to make it ſerve to any good purpoſe, be carefully cultivated, and regularly employed. Give me leave then for once to ſuppoſe this faculty to be thus cultivated, thus employed, without either ſetting out in its enquiries with a ſenſe of religion, or arriving at the diſcovery in the progreſs of them. And what will be the reſult with regard to ſociety? We may expect many curious diſquiſitions upon the nature of a ſyſtem; upon the relation which the parts of ſuch ſyſtem bear to the whole; and, in ſhort, upon the reaſonableneſs, that each member of a community ſhould refer his aims and purſuits, and even ſacrifice his private advantage, to the general good. But, to ſpeak impartially, whatever may be ſaid for any member of ſociety ſacrificing his own private intereſts to thoſe of the public; this muſt be underſtood of ſuch private intereſts only, as make no part of his ultimate happineſs. For ſurely it muſt

muſt ever be extremely difficult, if not impoſſible, to perſuade any man, at leaſt on the principles of reaſon, to give up his own final intereſts for any conſideration whatſoever. Whereas, without the ſuppoſition of a Deity, every good we are poſſeſſed of may be our ultimate good; every intereſt we can forego may prove our final intereſt. What a damp then muſt irreligious principles, caſt upon all generous ſentiments! How heavily muſt all public deſigns proceed, when the conductors of them have not in all their thoughts that being, who alone can, in caſe of preſent interference, bid ſelf-love and ſocial be finally the ſame.

But, in truth we need not ſtay to enquire, what our rational faculties would direct, on the ſuppoſition before us. If the united ties of reaſon and religion, are ſo unable to reſtrain men from yielding to the impulſe of diſorderly affections, as we find them to be; how eaſily would men break the bonds of reaſon only in ſunder! With how little concern would they caſt away its cords from them! Indeed, who could in this caſe think it worth while to collect the dictates, or to hearken to the voice, of reaſon? Men that can be content-

contented to have no hope, to be without God in the world, muſt have anticipated the inſenſibility they expect for their final portion; or, however, they will, in courſe, ſoon abandon the care of the rational, and deliver themſelves up to a merely animal life. Why ſhould a man take much fruitleſs pains, to increaſe his ſorrow by increaſing his knowledge; or to cultivate a faculty, the improvement of which could at beſt ſerve only to render him more ingenious in diſquieting himſelf in vain!

The truth is briefly this. The faculty of reaſon, when regularly conſulted and faithfully followed, will always lead us to the acknowledgment of a Deity, and own itſelf to be his gift, "who teach-"eth us more than the beaſts of the earth, "and maketh us wiſer than the fowls "of heaven." And when it does this, it comes moſt ſtrongly recommended to our care and cultivation, our attention and reverence. But if either out of lazineſs men ſtop ſhort of, or out of vicious prejudice exclude, or out of ſelf-ſufficiency affect an independence upon, the great principles of religion; the dictates of reaſon become uncertain and precarious;

ous; reaſon loſes its dignity and authority, and becomes a faculty in every view wholly unaccountable.

Benevolence and public ſpirit are indeed principles of a more active nature, and may perhaps be thought capable of ſupplying the deficiencies of reaſon with regard to ſocial happineſs. But it is manifeſt that beſides this, men have other affections, equally natural and univerſal, and at leaſt equally importunate for their reſpective gratifications. And whenever the gratification of the former ſhould interfere with that of the latter (as it frequently would in reality, and more frequently in appearance) we may appeal to experience to determine for us, what the reſult would generally be, were men actuated by no farther views, no higher principle. But ſhould ſome few be diſpoſed to hearken to the ſtill ſmall voice of nature in favour of the public, ſuch a diſpoſition could only ſerve to render its owners a more eaſy prey to the force or fraud of an infinitely greater number.

How unfriendly a diſbelief of the principles of religion muſt be to public ſpirit, in the accounts of reaſon, has been already intimated: but it is more than

probable, that the influence it would have directly and immediately on men's purſuits, and their very tempers, would be much more ſo. The active part of mankind would naturally put themſelves under the conduct of ſelf-intereſt, or ſome worſe paſſion; whilſt the more ſedentary would deliver themſelves up to gloom and melancholy, to ſpleen and ſullenneſs. And how ill muſt every generous affection thrive in ſuch a ſoil! We are ſurpriſed and ſhocked at the ingratitude and inhumanity of Nabal to his benefactor, applying for relief under the humble and at the ſame time endearing appellation of his ſon David. But all this is fully accounted for, when we read, that he was a man of Belial; inſenſible of the obligations, and a ſtranger to the comforts, of religion; and no wonder then if deaf alſo to all the demands of humanity.

With what different ſentiments does a ſenſe of religion inſpire us towards our fellow-creatures! That we have all one father; who careth for all alike: that our intereſts are in the hands of a moſt wiſe and gracious being! What calmneſs muſt ſuch reflections ſpeak to our breaſts:

breaſts: what chearfulneſs muſt they diffuſe through our whole conduct towards thoſe around us! Our gloomy thoughts, our melancholy apprehenſions, are all now diſpelled. Here is room and encouragement for every generous affection. Conſcious of being continually under ſuch a protection, we are no longer anxious about our private concerns; we can allow thoſe of the public a juſt ſhare in our regards. "We look not every "man on his own things, but every man "alſo on the things of others."

Honour, conſidered as a principle of action, conſiſts in a ſenſe of the dignity of our nature, and a reſolution at all hazards to act up to it. A habit of mind, which when conducted by reaſon, and ſupported by religion, will ever produce excellent fruits, and can hardly be too much encouraged: but when it takes, (as without religion it ever will take) popular and prevailing notions for the ſtandard of what is agreeable to a man's dignity or character; this habit of mind becomes a moſt capricious, and may be a moſt deſtructive, principle; nor is there, in fact, any thing ſo ridiculous, or ſo deſtructive of public order,

to the commiſſion of which our men of honour will not be eaſily reconciled, nay, for which they will not challenge applauſe. So precarious will the morals, as well as the faith, of thoſe perſons always be found, "who receive "honour one of another, and ſeek not the "honour that cometh from God on-"ly.

The truth is, religion furniſhes us with the only rational foundation for a ſenſe of honour. If man be ſuppoſed, with regard to his whole nature, (and ſomething like this the atheiſt, if he thinks at all, muſt ſuppoſe) to come up like a flower, and be cut down again, like a vegetable to bloſſom and flouriſh for a little while, and then to decay, wither, and ſink into the ground from which he ſprung; if he be ſuppoſed to come into this world by chance; to ſojourn in it for a few years as in a ſtrange land; continually reminded of his defenceleſs condition, and not conſcious of any ſuperior protection; and, after a dull round of enjoyments and purſuits, to drop into nothing as if he had never been: need I aſk, what dignity there is in ſuch a compoſition as this? No certainly.

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We muſt be excuſed from expecting any great aſſiſtance to morality, any conſiderable ſervices to the public, from the honour of thoſe perſons, who own themſelves to be of ſuch an extraction, and can give us no better account, whence they come, and whither they are going!

Civil government was the laſt expedient above-mentioned for ſecuring mankind againſt the ill effects of the appetites and paſſions of each other: and an expedient it undoubtedly is moſt beneficial, indeed in man's preſent ſtate abſolutely neceſſary, for that purpoſe. But it is as certain, that civil government has always called in the influences of religion to its aſſiſtance and ſupport; and in the nature of things always muſt do ſo.

I inſiſt not here on the atheiſt's giving us a ſatisfactory account of the firſt formation of civil ſocieties; or on his clearing up the many ſuppoſitions he muſt make previouſly to the ſuppoſition of any conſtitution of government at all. Let us ſuppoſe with him that a great majority, as the governed in every ſociety muſt be, have quitted their favorite natural equality, and ſubjected themſelves to one, or,

at moſt, a few, of their brethren. We aſk then, what ſhall ſecure to the governed the beneficial exerciſe of the power they have conveyed, and to the governours, the firmneſs and continuance of the conveyance? What ſhall engage the ſeveral members of the community to contribute their reſpective ſhares to the public weal? And, in ſhort, what ſhall render government, in every reſpect, a real and general bleſſing?

We have ſeen, how inſufficient the faculty of reaſon, and the principles of benevolence or honour, will always, of themſelves, be in particular perſons, to withſtand the force of appetite and paſſion: and we may well ſuppoſe, the addition of power will hardly diminiſh the force of thoſe appetites and paſſions, which it gives an opportunity of gratifying. Exaltation and dominion have been always obſerved to be of an intoxicating nature. And though government under the moſt diſadvantageous circumſtances may ſeem preferable to anarchy; yet, it is certain, governors conſcious of being armed with power, and not conſcious of any ſuperior being, from whom they derive, and to whom they are accountable for

for it, might, and, human nature gives us reaſon to apprehend, generally would, render a nation or people very miſerable.

Let us, however, ſuppoſe the governing part of the ſociety, from whatever principle, heartily diſpoſed to promote its welfare and proſperity: yet, how ſhall they be ſecure of being ſupported in their authority? Or, without ſuch ſecurity, how ſhall they proceed with proper vigour in accompliſhing the good ends of it? If a number of men be ſuppoſed to have devolved ſo much power, upon one or a few of their equals, as is requiſite for their protection, and the promotion of their intereſts: we need not doubt but they will think themſelves at liberty, at leaſt, to reſume that power, whenſoever they do not, or, which will be a much more common caſe, whenſoever they imagine they do not, reap the advantages expected from it. And, whilſt every little diſappointment, every trivial grievance, every wanton deſire of change, ſhall by thoſe, who will be at once parties and judges in their own cauſe, be improved into a ſufficient reaſon for inſurrection and rebellion, how precarious muſt be

the tenure by which any prince can hold his authority! How weak the hands of a good prince in exerting it to any beneficial purpoſe! How vain muſt it be to expect, that thoſe perſons, who fear not God, ſhould, on any principle that can be relied upon, honour the king!

But ſuppoſing the boundaries of governours and governed regularly adjuſted, and all the ſecurity given of a mutual concurrence for the public good, that can well be imagined; ſtill it remains to be conſidered, how the good ends of government itſelf ſhall be purſued and accompliſhed? I would on this occaſion particularly ſpecify two of theſe ends: that of determining differences which ſhall ariſe about property; and that of protecting, as much as poſſible, the members of the community from mutual invaſions, by proper applications of penal ſanctions. The diſpenſers of juſtice muſt in many if not all caſes of both kinds, determine upon ſuch evidence as can be had only from the teſtimony of others. But what ſecurity can they have of the veracity of ſuch teſtimony, but upon a preſumption that the perſon who gives it is under the awe of a being from whom

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no ſecrets are hid? Without this preſumption, courts of judicature cannot take one ſtep with any ſatisfaction or aſſurance: an oath can have no meaning, and all judicial proceſſes muſt become idle pomp, and trifling ſolemnity.

Add to all this, that many practices, of a tendency very prejudicial to public welfare, are yet of ſuch a nature as expoſes them not to the cenſure of human laws. The greateſt crimes may often be perpetrated ſo ſecretly as to eſcape the knowledge, and the greateſt criminals may ſometimes be ſo numerous, or ſo powerful, as to defy the reſentment, of the magiſtrate. In all theſe caſes, and many others, civil government muſt ever be unable to puniſh, and therefore alſo inſufficient to reſtrain.

In ſhort; without religion, it is hard to ſay, what foundation there could be for any ſuch mutual truſt and confidence among men, as is neceſſary to the ſupport of government, and the very being of ſociety. Without ſuppoſing each other under the influence of this principle, every man might too juſtly be in perpetual fear of every other, who ſhould be ei-

ther ſtronger or more ſubtle than himſelf; ſo long as the one could think himſelf poſſeſſed of any thing, which the other might think it worth while to invade; or ſo long as the other could be ſuppoſed to have either luſt or appetite, revengful or even wanton humours, to be gratified by infeſting him. The apprehenſion that every one who ſhould meet him would ſlay him, muſt in this ſtate of things be the melancholy portion of every ſon of Adam; and all mankind might join in the complaint, "My puniſhment is greater than I can bear!"

But "the Lord is king, the earth may be glad thereof!" When we take into our account the general acknowledgment of a God, a providence, and a future ſtate; the face of the moral world is changed; ſociety becomes practicable, and government a bleſſing. Whilſt religious principles prevail, good kings may reign with ſecurity to themſelves, and benefit to their people. Subordinate magiſtrates will know themſelves to be under the ſtrongeſt obligation, the moſt powerful engagement, to decree juſtice: and may proceed in doing ſo with chearfulneſs and aſſurance, whilſt thoſe who give them infor-

information, evidence or verdict, ſhould do it in truth and righteouſneſs, as ſeeing him who is inviſible. The peaceable and inoffenſive ſubject will have all the ſecurity with regard to his perſon and property, that either a ſenſe of an Almighty protection in his own breaſt, or the ſuppoſed awe of an Almighty vengeance in the breaſts of other men, can poſſibly give him. And thoſe who are diſpoſed to be contentious and injurious, muſt, to come at the properties of others, break looſe from all the ties of intereſt as well as conſcience: they muſt, by giving diſturbance to ſociety, expoſe themſelves not only to the puniſhment inflicted by the magiſtrate, but to a more inevitable, more dreadful, indignation: they muſt firſt abandon the care of their own happineſs, before they can invade that of other men; and become in the plaineſt ſenſe fools, in order to be knaves.

Upon the whole; the remedies we have been conſidering are ſuch as, in the preſent ſtate of things, and under a general ſenſe of religion, ſocieties are certainly much indebted to. But, ſhould they once ſet aſide the ſupports and enforcements of religion, they would ſoon ex-

perience the inſufficiency of all other preſervatives of public order and happineſs; and lament their having parted with the only effectual reſtraint upon thoſe luſts and paſſions, "from whence come wars "and fightings, confuſion and every evil work:" a reſtraint of univerſal extent, and only not irreſiſtible efficacy: the influence whereof reaches to every relation, every office, of life; which like the great object of it, is about our bed and about our path; which follows us into the cloſeſt receſſes, and meets us in every thought: a reſtraint to the powerfulneſs of which the libertine and the atheiſt loudly bear teſtimony; the former, by making it his avowed quarrel with religion, and the latter, his boaſted triumph upon a pretended conqueſt over it: but a reſtraint, which we muſt have leave to glory in our profeſſed ſubjection to; as well knowing, it debars us of no liberty but ſuch as is deſtructive of public as well as private happineſs; that it maintains the juſt authority of thoſe parts only, both in the political ſyſtem without us, and the moral one within us, which are fitted to govern; and requires the ſubordination of

thoſe

thoſe only which are fitted to obey: and a reſtraint therefore, which we conſider not as the invader, but as the guardian, of both ſocial and perſonal freedom.

After all, I muſt not omit a material exception to what has been offered. The effects of a religious principle will, of courſe, depend on the notions men entertain concerning the object of it. Thus, if the nature of the Deity be uncertain, or his will unknown, a morality, which ought to conſiſt in an imitation of that nature, and an obedience to that will, muſt become imperfect and precarious in proportion. But, ſhould the Deity be conceived to be a capricious and weak being, much more, an example and patron of treachery, cruelty, or any other vices. Such a corrupt religion muſt have an influence by no means favourable to the morals of its profeſſors, or the intereſts of ſociety.

But it is our happineſs that we profeſs a religion which is liable to no ſuch objection. Chriſtianity repreſents the Deity at once in the moſt amiable, and the moſt awful light: in his own nature, as a pure ſpirit, every where preſent, having "all things naked and open to his view;" "glo-

" glorious in holineſs," infinitely removed from all imperfection, all poſſibility of being ſo much as " tempted to ſin:" towards his creatures, as a being " graci- " ous and merciful, ſlow to anger, and " of great kindneſs;" yet as " by no means willing to clear the guilty," but as " a conſuming fire" to obſtinate offenders: towards ſocieties or nations, as viſibly making their proſperity or adverſity correſpond with their piety or impiety: and towards all mankind in their private capacities, as having " appointed a day, in which he will judge " the world in righteouſneſs;" a day, in which he will compleatly adjuſt all the ſeeming irregularities in his preſent diſtributions; and render to every man his final allotment of everlaſting happineſs, or eternal deſtruction, according to his deeds. The truth is, every reaſon already given for the importance of religion in general to ſociety, has been only an anticipation of the proof of the excellency of that religion, which alone, with any certainty, repreſents its adorable author as uniformly and unchangeably holy, and juſt, and good.

From

From ſuch an inſtitution what aſſiſtance and encouragement muſt not morality receive? How friendly muſt it needs be, in its natural tendency, to the intereſts of civil ſocieties? What could a lover of mankind more ardently wiſh for, than that ſuch a religion ſhould be every where received and obeyed?

From the preceding view of the importance of religion to civil ſocieties we may infer, firſt that religion is a proper object of the regard, and worthy of the encouragement of all thoſe, who are intruſted with the care of national virtue and happineſs.

By religion I here underſtand not only the internal belief of a God and providence, together with thoſe pious affections which that belief tends naturally to produce: but alſo thoſe outward expreſſions of both in acts of ſocial worſhip, by which a ſociety of reaſonable creatures, ſenſible of many common wants to be ſupplied, many common calamities to be averted, many common benefits to be acknowledged, would conclude it neceſſary to apply to their common creator and governour. Religion conſidered as a principle ſeated in the heart, may be allowed

allowed to be a perſonal concern. But it is certain, even perſonal religion never did, nor ever will, generally or conſiderably prevail, where ſome outward profeſſion of it is not regularly kept up; where the members of a community are not frequently called together to recogniſe the authority of the Supreme Being, and to teſtify their awful ſenſe of his power, majeſty, and goodneſs, by devout expreſſions of it. And, I may add, attendance on ſome viſible worſhip of Almighty God is neceſſary to lay a foundation for mutual truſt and confidence among the members of any ſociety, and to enable them to give each other the ſatisfaction of their being under the influence of the ſame common principle. In ſhort, both the internal principle and the external profeſſion of religion are neceſſary, not only as branches of our duty to God, but to ſecure the natural good ends of religion to civil ſociety. For the promotion and ſupport of each therefore, every prudent as well as pious magiſtracy will think itſelf concerned to make a competent proviſion.

From what hath been ſaid, we may farther infer that thoſe perſons, who have volun-

voluntarily dedicated themſelves to the office of explaining and inculcating the great principles of religion, and the duties of morality, and have devoted their time and their labours to a continual attendance on this ſervice, may reaſonably expect to be conſidered, regarded, and ſupported, as uſeful members of the community.

We may declaim plauſibly upon the ſelf-ſufficiency of that reaſon which is common to all men; it may be ſaid, that the great principles of natural religion, and, in a country where the ſcriptures are in every one's hands, thoſe of revealed religion alſo, muſt be clearly diſcoverable by reaſon: and this kind of flattery will always be moſt greedily ſwallowed by thoſe who are leaſt entitled to it. But, to conſider this matter impartially, by what reaſon are theſe things ſo clearly diſcoverable? Not ſurely by the reaſon of children, either in age or in underſtanding: but by reaſon regularly cultivated, faithfully conſulted, and as faithfully followed. And of how ſmall a part of mankind ſuch a reaſon as this will ordinarily be the portion, let experience determine. In fact, information

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and inſtruction are neceſſary to give mankind in general a proper acquaintance with thoſe truths, which they are moſt nearly concerned to know. And, even after the "good ſeed of the word is ſown, "and has taken root, the cares of this "world," the numerous concerns, about which the greateſt part of makind ever have ſuffered, and ever will ſuffer, their time and their thoughts to be almoſt wholly engaged, would ſoon choak it, and render it unfruitful, were not the ſame watchful care employed in a continual cultivation of it. To ſpeak freely, that a conſiderable part of our ſpecies does not degenerate into barbarians, if not ſavages, is in a great meaſure owing to ſuch ſtated returns of attendance on the public worſhip of Almighty God, and of hearing his word explained and enforced, as we of this nation enjoy.

In ſhort; if the intereſts of ſocieties be at all concerned in the prevalence of religion in general, or the happineſs of this nation in that of the reformed religion in particular; it is as certain, that the credit and influence of both are cloſely connected with the reputation of thoſe who are appointed to teach them. A conſideration, which

which muſt ever plead for a ſuitable regard and ſupport to the teachers of religion; as it is undoubtedly a moſt powerful engagement upon perſons, in a ſituation of ſo great conſequence, to take heed unto themſelves.

To conclude; Let us all, as we would approve ourſelves not only faithful ſervants of God, but hearty friends to our country, give all diligence, firſt to fix in our own minds, and then, as our ſtations and influence ſhall enable us, to propagate in the minds of others, a juſt ſenſe of the truth and importance of religion. And under the influence of this principle, let us carefully and conſcientiouſly diſcharge our reſpective duties in our ſeveral ſtations, as to the Lord and not to men. So ſhall the work of our country proſper in our hands, and we ſhall derive upon it the bleſſedneſs of a people who have the Lord for their God. And, when theſe ſocieties, to which we here ſtand related, ſhall be diſſolved, and "every one of us ſhall give an account of himſelf before the judgment-"ſeat of Chriſt," ſuch a diligent improvement, and religious application, of our talents, to the glory of God and the good

good of mankind, will ſecure to us that gracious ſentence from our merciful judge, " Well done, thou good " and faithful ſervant: thou haſt been " faithful over a few things, I will make " thee ruler over many things: enter " thou into the joy of thy Lord."

SER-

SERMON VII.

ON THE NECESSITY OF PRACTISING UNIVERSAL VIRTUE.

JAMES ii. 11.

For he that ſaid, do not commit adultery, ſaid alſo, do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a tranſgreſſor of the law.

THIS is the reaſon St. James gives for a poſition he had juſt before laid down, that "whoſoever ſhall keep "the whole law, and yet offend in one "point,

" point, he is guilty of all." A paſſage from whence many weak profeſſors of chriſtianity have drawn the moſt uncomfortable concluſions to themſelves; as if not only every deliberate, but every caſual fault, would involve them in the moſt fatal guilt; and have thereby been led into the moſt dreadful horrors of deſpair.

But that this cannot be ſuppoſed to be the ſenſe of St. James, appears not only from the whole tenor of the doctrine of mercy and forgiveneſs, annexed to repentance in the goſpel; but likewiſe from certain paſſages in this very epiſtle, as well as many others in the holy ſcriptures. In many things, ſays he himſelf in the chapter following, we offend all. Now what poſſible reaſon can be aſſigned, why we ſhould be allowed opportunity of offending in many things, if offending in one alone ſhould ſubject us to condemnation?

It is therefore both a principle of common ſenſe, and very evident from the explanation given in the text; that the intent of this and ſuch like paſſages, is only to enforce the practice of univerſal virtue, and correct every vicious and irregular

regular habit, becauſe he that ſaid, do not commit adultery, ſaid alſo, do not kill. And accordingly the intention of this diſcouſe will be to ſhow,

That in order to obtain the approbation of God, and our acceptance with him, it will not be enough that we excel in the practice of ſome virtues; nay that, as the apoſtle ſays, we keep the whole law, and habitually offend in one point only; but that we muſt conform to it univerſally in every branch; being, with reſpect to our general characters, as St. Paul ſays, without ſpot, or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing. For though God Almighty does mercifully allow of repentance after the commiſſion of ſin; there is not by the law of the goſpel, the leaſt indulgence given to any deliberate violation of the laws of virtue.

In diſcourſing on this ſubject, I ſhall, firſt, make ſome obſervations on the ways by which men are apt to deceive themſelves in this reſpect, and ſatisfy their own minds with a partial regard to the duties of virtue; and then offer ſome reaſons for the univerſal practice of it; and particularly explain that which the apoſtle has pro-

propoſed to our conſideration in the text.

Were men to live alone, and have no connection with ſociety, they would need no other virtues than induſtry, temperance, and devotion. But a man in ſociety, ſtanding in innumerable relations to other beings around him, will never be looked upon as having a good character, unleſs he be compaſſionate, hoſpitable, candid and bountiful, as well as induſtrious, temperate, and devout.

And yet, how partial do we ſee men in theſe reſpects? Many think a mercantile exactneſs in matters of property, to be the whole of virtue, and if they pay every one their own, they preſume "they have waſhed their hands in in-"nocency," and may compaſs the altar of God, without the leaſt apprehenſions. But he that ſaid, "owe no man any thing," added alſo, but to love another. He that taught us to render to all their due, hath taught us alſo to "lend, hoping for "nothing again, and from him that "would borrow of us, not to turn a-"way." It is true "he that doth right-"eouſneſs, is righteous, even as God is "righteous;" but, the righteouſneſs of God

God conſiſts, not only in juſtice, but in mercy, patience, and forgiveneſs: nay, men may be really conſcientious in the practice of all the external duties of devotion, and yet for want of this univerſal virtue, be unjuſtified in the ſight of God.

Our Saviour ſpake a parable to his diſciples, on purpoſe to convince them of the truth of this; namely, that of "two men who went up into the temple "to pray, the one a phariſee, the other "a publican." The phariſee appealed unto him that ſearcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of the children of men, that he "faſted twice in the week, and "gave tithes of all that he poſſeſſed;" and our Saviour inſinuates nothing at all to the contrary. The publican, conſcious of a vicious life, and unable to make any ſuch appeal, could only "ſmite up-"on his breaſt, and ſay, God be merci-"ful to me a ſinner:" and yet our Saviour tells his diſciples, that "the latter "went down to his houſe juſtified rather than the other." His contrite diſpoſition at that time, was more acceptable than the ſpiritual pride and arrogance which eclipſed the faſting, and tithes, and almſgiving of the phariſee. At another time

our Saviour aſks his diſciples, what they did "more than others, when they loved "thoſe only that loved them, for even "the publicans," perſons the Jews held in great contempt, "did the ſame?"

This is the principal means by which men deceive themſelves in this matter. The prudent miſer thanks his God, that he is no prodigal; and wonders how any one can ſquander away the good things of Providence. The benevolent prodigal ſtands amazed how any can ſordidly heap up riches, that will periſh with them. Each of theſe is extremely right in his opinion of the other; but entirely forgets to form a juſt judgment of himſelf. And even, allowing them all the advantage they can take from a compariſon between themſelves, their virtues are at beſt but partial; the truth being, that prudence, and benevolence, ſhould have their due proportion; and neither, without the other, can truly be called good, but receives its luſtre only by the contraſt. We ſhall perceive the force of the obſervation, by conſidering a character or two of this ſort in its true light.

Let us ſuppoſe then, a man of refined ſenſe and underſtanding; perfectly ſkilled in

in all the principles of natural, civil, and political juſtice; and acting on thoſe principles in the moſt ſcrupulous manner; ſuppoſe him a magiſtrate too, that would puniſh the violation of all the laws of ſociety in others, as ſeverely as he would judge of, and abſtain from them himſelf; add to all this, that he was devout beyond example, obſerved every rite of the religion of his country, and would ſuffer perſecution, nay even martyrdom in defence of them. Who, that without knowing, or enquiring farther into his character, would not highly eſteem and reverence the man? But if we found this juſt man as rigorous in his cenſures, as in his juſtice; putting the moſt unkind conſtructions on the actions of others that they will bear; and of a nature inexorable and unforgiving; if we found that though he would pay to a farthing, he would not give ſo much as a mite; of unſufferable pride to his inferiors in outward circumſtances; eſtimating himſelf and others by their worldly poſſeſſions, to which he is ſo attached that he thinks it the moſt imprudent thing in the world to adminiſter to the neceſſities of a fellow-creature;

incapable of ſhedding a tear at his misfortunes; leaving him to ſtruggle with them, and to get out of them as he can; reſigning him wholly to the providence of him that made him. What could any compaſſionate man think of ſuch a character!

Let us ſuppoſe again, another perſon poſſeſſed of many of the contrary virtues; moſt tenderly ſympathiſing with every object in diſtreſs, with a hand perpetually extended, and a purſe open to relieve them; that even prevented their very wiſhes, not waiting to be ſolicited, but flying to their relief; being indeed, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, "ready to give, and glad to diſtribute;" and this in the moſt unbounded manner, to friends and foes, to relations, countrymen, and the moſt diſtant foreigners; to the whole family of God, however circumſtanced, or however defective; and all in the kindeſt manner, doubling the favour by the addreſs and gracefulneſs of doing it: to which we will add, that he had a mind free from any of the rough and turbulent paſſions, but was of the moſt gentle, forgiving nature: would it not grieve one to find that ſo amiable a character had

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any "ſpot, or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing?" But let us ſuppoſe him, at the ſame time, a ſlave to other paſſions of equally miſchievous effects; miſtaking them for ſocial, kind, and benevolent affections; bringing ruin and infamy on the very object of his pretended love; ſmiling at the diſtreſs of the parents, whoſe child he has deſpoiled of her honour; multiplying their ſorrows, and even at laſt bringing down their grey hairs to the grave. Who that has any juſt ideas of purity and honour but muſt condemn him? at the ſame time that he might pity him, weep for him, and pray for him!

In both theſe characters (and they are drawn from real life) we ſee very great and good qualities; but at the ſame time great and miſchievous vices. And it is no excuſe for us to ſay, that the one paid the moſt ſacred regard to nice and punctilious juſtice; and the other had noble and extenſive benevolence; and therefore the righteouſneſs of the firſt, and the charity of the laſt, "will cover a multitude of ſins." Becauſe every man of conſiſtent virtue, muſt deteſt the faults of each, when taken ſeparately and a-

lone: and as the virtues of each, are nevertheleſs virtues, becauſe mixed with vices; ſo, neither are their vices at all the leſs ſo, becauſe mixed with virtues.

It will be the ſame with characters that have ſmaller proportions of either. Defects there may and always will be; but want of virtue there ſhould be none: that is, we ſhould always practiſe the duties enjoined, as well as abſtain from the ſins forbidden by chriſtianity. And yet it is truly the ſtate of the world; there are much fewer perſons in it notoriouſly bad, than conſpicuouſly and truly good. There are multitudes that would not oppreſs, nor rob, nor deceive; but there are few, extreamly few, that (except in their own families, and where it would be too ſhameful not to do it) give in any due proportion, "meat to "the hungry, and drink to the thirſty, "who take in the ſtranger, and cloath "the naked, who viſit the ſick, and come "to the relief of the priſoners." And yet, is there any chriſtian ignorant that theſe duties will be required of us at the day of judgment! Or who can help obſerving, that our Saviour in his repreſentation of that day, has not particularly

larly ſpecified the murderer, or adulterer among thoſe who ſhall ſtand on his left hand (it being evident to common reaſon and ſenſe, that they can have no other place) but has taken particular care to undeceive men on the ſubject we are diſcourſing of, by particularly pointing out to us, that thoſe likewiſe ſhall be aſſociated with them on the left hand, who have neglected the duties of charity and kindneſs that have been mentioned. Good God! what a ſad reverſe have we made in the chriſtian ſyſtem!

I have in a great meaſure prevented myſelf in what I propoſed, in the ſecond place, namely, to offer ſome reaſons for this practice of univerſal virtue; as you muſt, from what has been already ſaid, be well convinced of the neceſſity of it. However I ſhall confirm the ſentiment of the text by adding the following arguments.

The firſt ſhall be taken from the nature of our preſent ſtate and condition; namely, that of trial, and dicipline, and progreſs to perfection. Which is the reaſon of thoſe paſſages in the New Teſtament, that we ſhould be perfect and entire "wanting nothing;" that we

ſhould abſtain from "all appearance of evil," not having "ſpot, nor wrinkle, nor any ſuch thing." Now though this ſtate of trial neceſſarily implies in ſome periods of it, ignorance, weakneſs, and imperfection; yet it likewiſe implies, learning, improvement, facility, experience, and accompliſhment: like an apprenticeſhip, or a courſe of ſtudies, in which we are every day to become more and more expert, and maſters in our buſineſs. Which gave occaſion to a very wiſe and obvious queſtion which our Saviour aſked Nicodemus, "Art thou a "maſter in Iſrael, and knoweſt not theſe things?" In the ſame manner, we ſhould conſider the ſituations, characters, and relations that we bear in life, and be careful to practiſe the virtues, that are annexed to them. For as it would be a ſhame for a man to be without the knowledge and ſenſe of a child, ſo will it be for a creature that has had a conſiderable time of trial and diſcipline, to have made no more improvement in virtue than a child.

In this compariſon, I mean by virtue, ſomething more than innocence; namely, ſtrength, patience, fortitude, abſtinence, univer-

univerſal benevolence; not a dead, lifeleſs, inactive benevolence, like that of which St. James ſpeaks, which only ſays, "Be thou warmed, and filled;" but benevolence exerted in the moſt active, univerſal beneficence.

Another argument ariſes from hence, that the eſſence of virtue conſiſts, when rightly explained, in imitating the perfections of God. Now ſuppoſing, on one hand, we were to conſider him as meerly a juſt, rigorous, exacting being; or on the other hand, as a being of meer indulgent compaſſion, equally diſpenſed to the guilty, and to the innocent and virtuous; how much leſs amiable in the one caſe, and venerable in the other would he appear? It is the ſame with all rational beings. The end of religion is perfection; and perfection that conſiſts in being "perfect, as our father which is in heaven is perfect." For which reaſon the chriſtian revelation makes all moral virtue conſiſt in acting towards one another as brethren, and children of the ſame father, inſomuch that the whole of ſocial virtue is comprehended in that one idea of "brotherly love;" and when our Saviour enjoins us to love and forgive our enemies,

the reaſon is ſtill the ſame; "that we may be the children of our father which is in heaven." But we can have no poſſible claim to this relation, if we habitually neglect the practice of the virtues that conſtitute his moral character.

There is, moreover, ſuch a connection between the duties which compoſe the chriſtian life, that a defect in any one inſtance will naturally and neceſſarily create defects in others, not only in ourſelves but in thoſe about us. If we do not perform proper acts of juſtice, kindneſs, and charity to our neighbours; they may be abſolutely deſtitute of all relief, and conſequently be forced to do injuſtice to thoſe alſo with whom they are concerned, and either become vagabonds or thieves. If parents will not do their duty to their children, it is much more likely that they will enter into a vicious, than a virtuous courſe of life. And it is fact with reſpect to the world, that many things which we are apt ſeverely to impute as vices to others, are the natural, and almoſt unavoidable conſequence of the ill treatment they have met with. I might exemplify this in many other caſes; but it ſhall ſuffice to obſerve how nice and exact it ſhould render

render us in all our behaviour.

Laſtly, the neglect of any one duty of virtue is a violation of the law, and an oppoſition to the authority of God. An argument which the apoſtle has put in the ſtrongeſt manner poſſible in the text, "For he that ſaid, do not commit adul-"tery, ſaid alſo, do not kill. Now, if "thou commit no adultery, yet if thou "kill, thou art become a tranſgreſſor of "the law;" the reaſon for obeying the commands of God in any one caſe, being equally concluſive for obedience in all the reſt, ſince they are equally the dictates of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs: And diſobedience to them, is calling in queſtion and abſolutely denying either one, or both; ſetting up our own judgment in oppoſition to his; and refuſing ſubjection to his divine government. Which evidently ſhows that our obedience in other reſpects, does not ariſe from regard to his authority (for then we ſhould obey in all reſpects) but from wantonneſs, irregular inclination, paſſion, or private intereſt: and therefore ſuch practices, inſtead of atoning for other defects, will in fact be an aggravation of them.

Let us therefore in all our actions, endeavour to keep up in our minds a conſtant and lively ſenſe of his authority, and of his all-ſeeing eye which is witneſs to our moſt ſecret actions, and penetrates through the thickeſt darkneſs. And, as we have ſeen how men are apt to deceive themſelves in this reſpect, let us be upon our guard againſt every thing that may draw off our attention to any of the leaſt of the duties enjoined us by our holy religion.

There is one method of doing this, which though dictated by experience, may at firſt ſight appear ſtrange; and that is, not to over-rate, or ſet too high a value on any one virtue whatſoever. For it is by this means that we come to under-rate, or ſet too ſmall a value on the reſt. No man could ſo far deceive himſelf, as to be a miſer upon principle, if he did not ſet ſo great a value on frugality and prudence, as to lead him to deſpiſe the principles of generoſity and liberality. Nor could any one be a prodigal upon principle, if he did not ſet ſo high an eſteem on generoſity and liberality, as to contemn the virtues of frugality and prudence. A prejudice, often taken

taken from the great and odious attachment we ſee to theſe things in other perſons, which gives a diſtaſte and diſlike to ſuch characters. But let us remember from the example of the phariſee, that it is not enough, that "we are not as other men are:" our buſineſs is to be, what all men ſhould be. And at the day of judgment, we ſhall have no works of ſupererogation to produce; our virtues will receive no luſtre from compariſon, or contraſt: but the ſingle queſtion will be, whether we have made it our ſtudy and buſineſs, as the apoſtle enjoins us, to be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Without which we ſhall appear naked in the eye of the judge; and for want of a wedding-garment be thruſt into outward darkneſs.

Therefore, "brethren, whatſoever things "are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, "whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever "things are pure, whatſoever things are "lovely, whatſoever things are of good "report; if there be any virtue; and if "there be any pr[illegible]ſe, think on theſe "things."

SER-

SERMON VIII.

ON ZEAL.

REVELATIONS iii. 15, 16.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

RELIGION is the great ornament and glory of human nature; that which principally distinguishes men from the inferior orders of creatures; and upon

on which alone are grounded all hopes of life and happineſs hereafter, when this ſhort and tranſitory world ſhall be paſſed away. In a matter of ſo great importance therefore, it is very wonderful that any man who calls himſelf a reaſonable creature ſhould be careleſs and indifferent; careleſs, whether he has any religion or none; indifferent, whether his religion, when he does profeſs any, be true or falſe; careleſs, when he has embraced the true religion, whether he makes any improvement in his practice anſwerable to it, or not. The words of the text are a reproof ſent by our Saviour to the church of Laodicea, upon account of their remiſſneſs and lukewarmneſs in this laſt particular. The church of Laodicea, ſignifies either literally one of the ſeven primitive churches of Aſia, or figuratively one of the ſeven ſucceſſive ſtates or conditions of the primitive church catholic, before its falling into that univerſal antichriſtian corruption deſcribed in the following chapters of this book. In which ſoever of theſe two ſenſes we underſtand the church of Laodicea to be meant, yet ſtill, it being part of the primitive church before the times of that great

great and total apoſtacy; it is plain that the lukewarmneſs here charged upon them, cannot ſignify a general careleſſneſs whether they had any religion or none; nor an indifferency whether the religion they profeſſed was true or falſe; for theſe are the crimes of later ages, not of the primitive days: but their lukewarmneſs was a remiſſneſs or neglect of making an improvement in practice, anſwerable to the excellency of the religion they profeſſed. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot." The defect was in their works, or practice: they would not lay aſide the profeſſion of religion, and yet they would not live anſwerable to it by being "zealous of good works." This is what our Saviour reproves them for in the text: and to add weight and dignity to the reproof, it is introduced with a ſolemn deſcription of the greatneſs and excellency of the perſon who ſent it: "Unto the angel," ſays he, "of the church of the Laodi-
"ceans, write; theſe things ſaith the
"amen, the faithful and true witneſs,
"the beginning of the creation of God.
"I know thy works, that thou art nei-
"ther cold nor hot: I would thou wert
"cold,

" cold, or hot: ſo then, becauſe thou art " lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I " will ſpue thee out of my mouth: be- " cauſe thou ſayeſt, I am rich, and in- " creaſed with goods, and have need of " nothing; and knoweſt not that thou " art wretched and miſerable, and poor, " and blind, and naked:" naked, that is, deſtitute of the works of righteouſneſs; and blind, that is, inſenſible of the danger of their condition. The words therefore are a reproof to the Laodiceans for their want of zeal; and an intimation wherein the nature of true zeal conſiſts. " Thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot," is the reproof for want of zeal; and, " I know thy works, that thou art blind and naked," is an intimation what was the zeal they wanted. Now ſince theſe things are examples to us; and the ſcriptures are written for our admonition, " upon whom the ends of the world are come;" and the faults of which the primitive church was guilty, are much more increaſed in the ages of apoſtacy: it cannot but be very proper for us, from the conſideration of theſe affectionate words of our Saviour, to enquire, for our own inſtruction, into the nature

nature of true zeal, which the Laodiceans are here reproved for wanting; and alſo of that falſe zeal, which is apt to make chriſtians think themſelves to be rich, in the ſpiritual ſenſe, and to "have need of nothing," when indeed they are moſt "wretched and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

True zeal then, which is the virtue of a chriſtian, may be diſtinguiſhed from falſe zeal, which is the character of private parties or factions; principally by three ways: by the object about which it is employed; by the manner and circumſtances in which it expreſſes itſelf; and by the end to which it is directed.

The firſt mark, by which true and chriſtian zeal may be diſtinguiſhed from that which is falſe and unchriſtian is the object about which it is employed. The object of true chriſtian zeal is the ſtudy of truth, and the practice of right; the continued, impartial, unprejudiced enquiring after truth ourſelves; and the giving conſtant encouragement to all others to ſearch for it after the ſame manner: the conforming conſtantly our own practice, to the unqueſtionable eternal rules of right and equity; and uſing continually all juſt

juſt, honourable, and chriſtian means, to prevail with others likewiſe to do the ſame. On the contrary: the object of falſe and unchriſtian zeal, never is impartial inquiring what and where the truth is; but always the promoting violently, eſtabliſhing, and forcing men into the profeſſion of ſome imagined truth, without ever conſidering carefully whether it be really a truth or not: and in like manner, the inſiſting on the practice, not of ſuch things as are unqueſtionable and undiſputed acts of virtue and righteouſneſs; but of ſuch things principally as are the diſtinguiſhing practices, or practices built upon diſtinguiſhing opinions, of particular ſects or parties.

To explain this matter more particularly: the primary and proper object of a chriſtian and good zeal, is the promoting the practice of virtue and righteouſneſs. But becauſe right practice can hardly be built, at leaſt can never be built with any certainty and ſteadineſs, but upon the foundation of truth; therefore the object of zeal firſt in the order of nature, is the knowledge of truth. And zeal for ſearching after and diſcovering the truth can never be exceſſive.

"The

"The price of wiſdom is above rubies; "the topaz of Ethiopia ſhall not equal "it, neither ſhall it be valued with pure "gold. Buy the truth," ſaith Solomon, "and ſell it not; alſo wiſdom, and in- "ſtruction, and underſtanding." The like phraſe is uſed by our Saviour in the words immediately following my text; "I counſel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire"; that is, to enquire diligently after the uncorrupted doctrines of the goſpel, which will bear the trial of the moſt impartial examination; "and anoint "thine eyes with eye-ſalve, that thou "mayeſt ſee"; that is, lay aſide blind prejudices and corrupt affections, which hinder men from diſcerning the truth; and "ſearch the ſcriptures" with an unbiaſſed underſtanding, that in them you may find the words of eternal life. This zeal therefore, zeal for enquiring and ſearching after the truth, zeal to know perfectly the will of God, can never poſſibly be faulty in exceſs. All faultineſs upon this head, is always and only on the defective ſide: a want of zeal, a coldneſs and lukewarmneſs, a careleſſneſs and indifferency in men, whether the things they profeſs to believe, be true or not.

They

They receive things ignorantly and negligently at all adventures; they take their religion upon truſt, upon the authority of common repute; without being at all ſolicitous to underſtand it, or to know whereof they affirm: as if it was nothing more than the cuſtom of the country, or the faſhion of the place they live in. Hence, though the doctrine of Chriſt is ſo plainly and clearly expreſſed in the goſpel, that he who runs may read it; and all chriſtians, at all times and in all places, have been baptized into the profeſſion of the ſame faith, and into an obligation to obey the ſame commandments; yet for all this, what hath vulgarly been called chriſtian religion, has been at different times in the ſame country, and is now in different countries at the ſame time, as different from itſelf, as light is from darkneſs. The firſt, therefore, and original cauſe of all coruptions in religion is want of zeal for inquiring after truth; a coldneſs or lukewarmneſs, a careleſſneſs or indifferency in men, whether the things they profeſs to believe, be true or not. But then further; if we have never ſo much zeal

for

for enquiring after the truth, and never ſo much ſucceſs in that enquiry; yet ſtill even this is nothing without virtuous practices: and therefore, as I before obſerved, the great, the principal, the proper object of zeal, is the practice of virtue and true righteouſneſs. And here likewiſe, as well as in the caſe of ſearching after truth, there is no room for our zeal to be too great. Men may miſtake the object, and be zealous for ſomething elſe inſtead of virtue; or, when the object is right, the manner and circumſtances in which it expreſſes itſelf may be very faulty: but the degree of the zeal itſelf; the zeal for virtue, righteouſneſs, and equity, can never poſſibly be too great. "It is good," ſaith St. Paul, to be zealouſly affected always in a good thing. And the zeal of the Corinthians in their liberality to the poor of other churches, is by the ſame apoſtle commended as highly exemplary. And in his epiſtle to Titus, he declares that Chriſt gave himſelf for us, and redeemed us to this very end, that we might be a people zealous of good works. Our Lord himſelf, by a figure of ſpeech expreſſing a zeal which cannot be exceſſive, "Bleſſed," ſays he, "are they that hunger

hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs." And deſcribing his own practice, "My meat," ſays he, "is to do the will of him that ſent me, and to finiſh his work." And again, "The zeal of thy houſe has eaten me up." And when, in the words of the text, he had ſeverely rebuked the Laodiceans, for being "lukewarm and neither cold nor hot;" for making profeſſion of his religion, and yet being remiſs and negligent to improve themſelves in virtuous practice, anſwerable to the excellency of the religion they profeſſed; he adds immediately, "Be zealous therefore, and repent." This is the full notion of chriſtian and good zeal, with reſpect to the object about which it is employed: it is a zeal for the knowledge of truth, and for the practice of right; and this zeal, if it be not faulty in other circumſtances, the degree of it can never be exceſſive; men can never be too zealous for enquiring impartially into truth, or for doing what is confeſſedly and unqueſtionably right.

But what has been ſaid upon this head, will be ſtill further illuſtrated by conſidering, on the other hand, the nature of falſe and unchriſtian zeal, with regard

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to the object about which that alſo is employed. And the object of that, as I obſerved at the beginning, is always ſome imagined truth, never carefully examined whether it be really ſuch; or elſe ſome form or ceremony, of no great moment to religion and virtue; or perhaps ſome diſtinguiſhing practice, or practice founded upon ſome diſtinguiſhing opinion, of ſome particular ſect or party. To explain this, by inſtances: St. Paul relates, that the Corinthians were zealous, ſome of them for Paul, ſome of them for Apollos, and ſome for Cephas; and this their zeal, he tells them, was not ſpiritual, but carnal; that is to ſay, it was not for the religion of Chriſt, but for parties among men. Again: ſome, he tells us, upon the foundation of Chriſt, inſtead of gold, ſilver, and precious ſtones, built wood, hay and ſtubble; materials which would not bear the teſt of the fire: the meaning is; they were zealous for opinions, of which they had never carefully examined the truth; for doctrines, which had no uſeful influence upon practice; for forms and ceremonies, which made men not at all the more careful to lead a virtuous life. And of theſe things it is, that

our Saviour ſpeaks, in the words following my text. "Thou ſayeſt, I am rich, "and increaſed with goods, and have "need of nothing; and knoweſt not that "thou art wretched, and miſerable, and "poor, and blind, and naked." Again, we read, concerning the Gibeonites, to whom Joſhua and all Iſrael had ſolemnly ſworn they ſhould not be deſtroyed, that yet Saul long after ſought to ſlay them, in his zeal to the children of Iſrael and Judah. The object of his zeal was falſe, as well as the manner of it cruel: it was a zeal for the power and intereſt, as he fancied, of the children of Iſrael and Judah, in oppoſition to the reaſon of the thing, and to the oath of God.

To mention but one inſtance more: the whole body of the Jewiſh nation in our Saviour's days, were extremely zealous for the obſervation of the law, but it was a zeal without knowledge; it was a zeal without careful examination; it was a zeal for the ceremonial part of the law, more than for the moral; it was a zeal for the tradition of the elders and for the doctrines each of their own particular ſect, more than for the law of God: and the zeal which they had even for the law itſelf,

itſelf, was without conſidering, that the very end and deſign of the law was to lead men to the goſpel; that it was itſelf, in its own nature, but a type of Chriſt; and that God by the prophets had all along clearly enough intimated, that there was to be ſuch a change in the diſpenſation. For want of conſidering theſe things carefully and impartially, even thoſe Jews who were converted, continued ſtill, generally ſpeaking, all zealous of the law. And were very earneſt to enforce the obſervation of it upon other chriſtians: concerning whom St. Paul thus ſpeaks; they zealouſly affect you, but not well. And thoſe of them who were not converted, were exceedingly zealous, in their oppoſing the goſpel: I bear them record, ſays St. Paul, "that "they have a zeal of God, but not ac- "cording to knowledge; for they being "ignorant of God's righteouſneſs," of that method of ſalvation which God has appointed, "and going about to eſta- "bliſh their own righteouſneſs, have not "ſubmitted themſelves unto the righte- "ouſneſs of God;" for, Chriſt, ſaith he, is the end of the law. Of theſe, St. Paul himſelf, before his converſion,

was one. According to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, I was zealous, ſays he, towards God, as ye all are this day, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers, "touching the righteouſneſs which is in "the law, blameleſs; concerning zeal, "perſecuting the church, becauſe I ve-"rily thought with myſelf, that I ought "to do many things contrary to the name "of Jeſus." For when the object of zeal, is not the ſearching after truth and the practice of moral virtue, but the inconſiderately and raſhly promoting violently and by all means, ſome unexamined or imagined truth; it often comes to paſs, that even zeal itſelf for truth, degenerates into the moſt inveterate prejudice, and moſt incurable obſtinacy againſt it; and puts men upon the moſt unrighteous methods of propagating as they think, but indeed of oppoſing it. "They "ſhall put you out of the ſynagogues," ſaith our Saviour, "yea, the time cometh, "that whoſoever killeth you, will think "that he doth God ſervice." The reaſon follows: "theſe things will they do "unto you, becauſe they have not known "the father, nor me;" that is, becauſe they

they have no true notion, either of the religion of nature, or of Chriſt. The malignity of this ſort of prejudice is ſet forth to us under a moſt lively and expreſſive figure, in the hiſtory of Stephen's death; they ſtopped their ears, "and ran upon Stephen, and ſtoned him." They took effectual care, not to be convinced by what he ſhould ſay, they were, as the pſalmiſt expreſſes it, "like the deaf ad-"der that ſtoppeth her ears; which re-"fuſeth to hear the voice of the charmer, "charm he never ſo wiſely." Our Saviour deſcribes the unreaſonable prejudices of the phariſees, by the ſame figure of ſpeech; "why do ye not underſtand my "ſpeech? even becauſe ye cannot hear "my word." His meaning is; their vicious and corrupt inclinations, would not ſuffer them to hearken to the truth. And elſewhere in the ſame goſpel, he more than once expreſſes the ſame thing again, by ſtiling them blind. But

The next mark, by which true and chriſtian zeal may be diſtinguiſhed from that which is falſe and unchriſtian, is the manner and circumſtances in which it expreſſes itſelf. It is manifeſt that zeal cannot be at all a chriſtian virtue,

except it be imployed about its true and proper object, the ſearch after truth and the practice of right; but this alone is not ſufficient. For be its object ever ſo good, ſo that the zeal cannot poſſibly be exceſſive in its degree; yet ſtill by the manner and circumſtances in which it expreſſes itſelf, it may eaſily, if great care be not taken, degenerate into a falſe and unchriſtian zeal. Wrath and fierceneſs, contentiouſneſs and animoſity, violence and hatred, are vicious and ungodly practices, whether the object of a man's zeal be good or bad. St. Paul was not only faulty for perſecuting the chriſtians, when himſelf was a Jew; but he would alſo ſtill have continued to have been equally faulty, if he had perſecuted the Jews, when himſelf was a chriſtian. The character of the great author of our religion is this, "behold, my beloved, in "whom my ſoul is well pleaſed, I will "put my ſpirit upon him, and he ſhall "ſhow judgment unto the gentiles; he "ſhall not ſtrive, nor cry, neither ſhall "any man hear his voice in the ſtreets; "a bruiſed reed ſhall he not break, and "ſmoaking flax ſhall he not quench, till "he ſend forth judgment unto victory."

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And when ſome of his own diſciples, beginning to depart from this example, would have called for fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, he rebuked them, ſaying, "ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of." According to this great pattern, St Paul directs, "that the "ſervant of the Lord muſt not ſtrive, "but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, "patient, in meekneſs inſtructing thoſe "that oppoſe themſelves." And he adviſes all chriſtians, to let their moderation be known unto all men: their moderation, that is, not a luke-warmneſs or indifferency in religion, an indifferency in the great and weightier matters of the law, which is the luke-warmneſs reproved in the text, and which is very conſiſtent with men's being infinitely zealous about trifles; but, by moderation, St. Paul means that meekneſs, calmneſs, and equitableneſs of ſpirit, which very well agrees with, and indeed uſually accompanies, the higheſt poſſible zeal for truth and virtue. The want of this ſpirit it was, that the ſame apoſtle complains of in the Corinthians, in the following manner; whereas there is among you envying and ſtrife and diviſions, are ye not

carnal, and walk as men? his meaning is, do ye not act like men who are more concerned for your own private parties and paſſions, than for the religion of Chriſt? "Now ye are full, now ye are "rich, ye have reigned as kings without "us;" that is, ye are puffed up, and grown inſolent and domineering, in your ſeveral parties and diviſions, one againſt another. The manner of expreſſion is exactly like that in the text, where our Saviour, having rebuked the church of Laodicea for being luke-warm and careleſs as to the works or fruits of true religion, immediately adds, yet "thou ſay-"eſt, I am rich, and increaſed with "goods, and have need of nothing; and "knoweſt not that thou art wretched, "and miſerable, and poor, and blind, "and naked."

But to proceed: how right ſoever the object of our zeal be, yet if that zeal be accompanied with the wrath of man, the nature of it, St. James tells us, is entirely altered, and it worketh not the righteouſneſs of God. For wars and fightings, that is hatred, animoſities, contentiouſneſs, and deſire of rule over each other, can proceed from nothing but from your

your luſts, that is, from worldly paſſions, not from zeal for true religion. And whoſoever takes pleaſure in injuring his brother, it is abſurd and ridiculous, St. John aſſures us, for ſuch a one to pretend he does it out of zeal towards God: "if a man ſay, I love God, and hateth "his brother, he is a liar."

And laſtly; The laſt particular, by which a religious zeal is diſtinguiſhed from a human paſſion, and by which it becomes truly and properly a chriſtian virtue, is the end or intention towards which it is directed. A zeal for inquiring after truth may poſſibly be nothing but curioſity; and a zeal even for doing what is right, may poſſibly ſometimes proceed merely from temporal views. In which caſes, poſſibly indeed it may be a uſeful and commendable paſſion; provided the manner and circumſtances in which it expreſſes itſelf be not faulty. But nothing makes it properly a chriſtian virtue, but when, together with all the forementioned requiſites, the end alſo or intention to which it is ultimately directed is the honour and glory of God. By the honour and glory of God always taking care that we mean not any thing

imaginary and enthuſiaſtic, which often turns religious zeal into ſome of the worſt and moſt pernicious of all vices; but that thereby be conſtantly meant the eſtabliſhment of God's kingdom of righteouſneſs here, in truth and peace and charity, in order to the ſalvation of men's ſouls hereafter in his eternal kingdom of glory. I conclude therefore with the words of the wiſe ſon of Sirach; "Whatſoever thou takeſt in hand, re-"member the end, and thou ſhalt never "do amiſs."

SER-

SERMON IX.

RELIGION DISTINGUISHED FROM SUPERSTITION.

JOB xxiii. 15.

Therefore am I troubled at his preſence: when I conſider, I am afraid of him.

IN this chapter Job gives a noble deſcription of the ſenſe he had upon his mind of the inviſible omnipreſence and omniſcience of God. "Behold, I go "forward, but he is not there: and "backward, but I cannot perceive him:

"on the left hand where he doth work, "but I cannot behold him; he hideth "himſelf on the right hand, that I can- "not ſee him: but he knoweth the way "that I take." To a man of virtue and integrity, the conſideration of this great truth is a ſolid ground of real and laſting ſatisfaction. "He knoweth the "way that I take: my foot hath held "his ſteps; his way have I kept, and "not declined: neither have I gone back "from the commandment of his lips: I "have eſteemed the words of his mouth "more than my neceſſary food." In times of affliction particularly, it is an inexpreſſible ſupport if a man can be able to ſay with this exemplary perſon, "O that I knew where I might find "him! that I might come even to his "ſeat! I would order my cauſe before "him, and fill my mouth with argu- "ments. Will he plead againſt me "with his great power? No; but he "would put ſtrength in me. He know- "eth the way that I take: when he hath "tried me, I ſhall come forth as gold." Nevertheleſs, though the hope ſignified by theſe high expreſſions is indeed a well-grounded hope, and what St. John calls

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an "aſſuring of our hearts before God;" yet conſidering the infinite purity of the divine nature, the frailty of this our mortal ſtate, and the unprofitableneſs even of our beſt ſervices, and our aptneſs to impoſe upon ourſelves, and to deceive through careleſſneſs even our own hearts; ſo that though a man be not conſcious to himſelf of any great wickedneſs, yet is he "not thereby juſtified, but he that juſtifies him is the Lord:" and conſidering alſo, that, in the nature of things, there cannot but be many ſecrets in the diſpenſations of Providence, and in God's government of the univerſe, unſearchable to our ſhort and limited underſtandings; it is not without great reaſon that Job immediately corrects himſelf in the words next following; "But he is "in one mind, and who can turn him? "For he performeth the thing that is "appointed for me; and many ſuch "things are with him. Therefore am I "troubled at his preſence; when I con-"ſider, I am afraid of him." The expreſſions are of the ſame import as thoſe in the ninth chapter; "Lo, he goeth by "me, and I ſee him not; he paſſeth on "alſo, but I perceive him not. Behold,

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" he taketh away; who can hinder him?
" Who will ſay unto him, what doſt
" thou? Whom, though I were righte-
" ous, yet would I not anſwer; but I
" would make ſupplication to my judge."

The words of my text; " I am trou-
" bled at his preſence; when I conſider,
" I am afraid of him;" have, in the place they ſtand, a particular reference to theſe conſiderations. But I ſhall take them at this time in their larger ſenſe, as containing this more general and very important propoſition; that the fear of God is the reſult of conſideration, the reſult of attention, and true reaſon; not of empty indignation, and vain apprehenſions. " When I conſider, I am afraid of him."

By the fear of God, I would be underſtood to mean, not the ſuperſtitious dread of an arbitrary or cruel being; but that awe and regard, which neceſſarily ariſes in the mind of every man who believes and habitually conſiders himſelf as living and acting in the ſight of an omnipreſent governor, of perfect juſtice, holineſs and purity; who ſees every thought, as well as every action; who cannot be impoſed upon by any hypocriſy; who, as certainly as there is any difference between good

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and evil, cannot but approve the one and deteſt the other; and whoſe government, as certainly as he has any power at all, conſiſts in rewarding what he approves, and puniſhing what he hates. Of ſuch a governor as this, though we are ſure he is endued with infinite goodneſs, yet may it juſtly be ſaid with the greateſt reaſon, and without any tendency to ſuperſtition; "When I conſider, I am afraid of him."

This fear of God, is the foundation of religion. For though virtue is indeed amiable, abſolutely in its own nature; and, if the world could poſſibly be ſuppoſed to ſubſiſt without the government, and even without the being of God, ſtill the nature of good and evil would be what it is, and virtue would be in itſelf unalterably excellent, and vice for ever blame-worthy; yet the great ſupport of virtue among men, is the ſenſe upon their minds of a ſupreme governor and judge of the univerſe, who will finally and effectually reward what is in itſelf eſſentially worthy of reward, and puniſh what is worthy of puniſhment. To a perfect and unerring mind, incapable of being deceived, and which is exalted above all

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poſſible temptation; to ſuch a one, the intrinſic reaſon of things, the eſſential excellency of truth and right, is in itſelf a ſteady and always ſufficient motive of action. But men, who, when they know what is right, and neceſſarily approve it, yet at the ſame time find "another law "in their members warring againſt the "law of their mind," urging them with ſtrong paſſions and uneaſy appetites; and theſe ſolicited moreover with perpetual temptations from without, with allurements of pleaſure and profit, with baits of power and ambition, with examples of a degenerate and corrupt world, and with threatnings alſo of perpetual perſecutions in different kinds, if they adhere ſtedfaſtly to the intereſts of truth and virtue: to ſuch beings as theſe, I ſay; to finite, changeable, and fallible creatures; it is very neceſſary that "the "eternal intrinſic reaſon of things, the "eſſential and unalterable excellency of "truth and right," conſidered as a motive of action, ſhould be ſupported and ſtrengthened by a conſtant and lively ſenſe upon their minds of an univerſal ſupreme governor; who being eſſentially the fountain of all perfection, the "truth

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and reaſon of things" and the "unalterable right of every caſe" are conſequently the eternal laws of his kingdom: which, by his univerſal power and government over all, he will as certainly ſupport and maintain; finally rewarding virtue and puniſhing vice; as it is certain there is a difference between good and evil, and that infinite wiſdom cannot be inſenſible of that difference. A firm and ſettled perſuaſion of the reality and certainty of this great truth, that we are continually under the inſpection of ſuch a ſupreme governor and judge; of an omnipreſent ſpirit, "in whom we live and move and have our being," and to whom our very thoughts are open as our actions; cannot but fill the mind of every conſiderate perſon, with a juſt awe and fear of him: "When I conſider, I am afraid of him:" afraid, not as of an arbitrary and tyrannical power; but as of a juſt and powerful and wiſe governor, whoſe laws are reaſonable and neceſſary to be obeyed, and from whoſe juſt diſpleaſure the diſobedient can by no power or artifice be protected.

The ground of this fear, the text tells us, is reaſon and conſideration: "When I con-

I conſider, I am afraid of him." Atheiſtical and profane men ſuppoſe on the contrary, that the ground of this fear is timorouſneſs of temper, ſuperſtition, cuſtomary tradition, or political fiction. It is of infinitely great moment to determine which of theſe two is the truth; and therefore I ſhall conſider diſtinctly the very different grounds, characters, and effects of religion and ſuperſtition; and how theſe two things, which atheiſtical and corrupt minds would fain imagine to be the ſame, may be diſtinguiſhed from each other.

In the firſt place, as to the ground and foundation of religion. That there is an eſſential difference between good and evil, between virtue and vice, is what every man as clearly diſcerns by the natural and neceſſary perception of his own mind and conſcience, as his eyes ſee the difference between light and darkneſs. It is not a man's particular timorouſneſs of temper, it is not cuſtomary tradition from his anceſtors, it is not the imaginary ſpeculation of philoſophers, it is not the political fiction of governors, that makes him ſee when he is oppreſſed, defrauded, cheated, treated unjuſtly and injuriouſly; that

that theſe actions are in their own nature unrighteous, and the perſon who is guilty of them worthy of puniſhment. Every man, of every degree of capacity, in every age and in every nation, ſees and feels this to be the truth of things; and no accidental variety of temper, no tradition, no philoſophy, no form of government, can either alter or aboliſh theſe notions. The reaſonings and ſpeculations of men do not make things to be what they are; but only help men to diſcover with greater clearneſs, or to a deeper degree, what their real intrinſic natures are. Laws likewiſe do not make virtue to be virtue, or vice to be vice; but only enforce or diſcourage the practice of ſuch things as the very making of a law always and neceſſarily preſuppoſes to have been fit or unfit before the making of the law: becauſe otherwiſe all laws about moral matters would be profeſſedly to no purpoſe, and of no uſe. There may perhaps be in ſome men, and poſſibly in ſome whole nations, for want of attention and conſideration, a very great degree of ignorance, in many particular inſtances, of this natural and eſſential difference of good and evil; though

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I believe no perſon who had at all the uſe of his reaſon, ever was ſo univerſally ignorant as not to diſlike and think really blame-worthy a wilful breach of faith, or an act of cauſeleſs cruelty. But the ignorance, be it in what degree it will, either of any man or of any number of men; makes no alteration at all in the nature and truth of things; nor affords any argument againſt the reality of their eſſential differences. Were there in nature no real and unalterable difference between moral good and evil; it would follow, not only that whole nations might poſſibly be ignorant of this diſtinction; which is nothing to the purpoſe: for ſo they may be of the plaineſt mathematical truths, and yet thoſe truths not be at all the leſs certain: but it would follow, that whole nations might as poſſibly, with a full perſuaſion within themſelves of the ſtrength and clearneſs of their manner of reaſoning and arguing, determine in all inſtances univerſally virtue to be vice, and vice to be virtue, as we think we with reaſon determine the contrary: nay, it would be as eaſy, and as natural, and as probable they ſhould ſo determine, as that nations ſhould differ in the faſhion

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or colour of their cloaths, or in any other circumſtances of things by nature indifferent. Which ſince no man, I think, has ever been ſo abſurd as to affirm; it follows undeniably, that *that* firſt ground and foundation of religion, the eſſential difference between virtue and vice, is laid immutably and univerſally in the nature and reaſon of things: whereas all ſuperſtition, various always as the motion of the winds and clouds, is notoriouſly founded only in accidental temper, cuſtomary tradition, or political fiction.

Again: That there is an inviſible power preſiding over the univerſe, which is another part of the principal ground and foundation of religion; the belief, I ſay, of an inviſible power ruling over the univerſe, and which will finally ſupport virtue and puniſh wickedneſs; is a belief ariſing from reaſon and conſideration; which is directly contrary to the eſſence of ſuperſtition. The viſible works of nature every man by his own experience every day perceives evidently to be the effects of an inviſible power. The more extenſive, and the more exact any man's obſervations are, the more evidences he continually finds of the reality and of the greatneſs

greatneſs of this inviſible power: but even to the meaneſt capacities, and in the moſt obvious occurrences of life, God has by no means "left himſelf without "witneſs, cauſing his ſun to ſhine, and "ſending us rain and fruitful ſeaſons, "filling our hearts with food and glad-"neſs." The marvelouſneſs of the works of nature ſhows the greatneſs of this power; and the regularity and uniformity of them ſhows it to be the power of one and the ſame agent, acting or directing every where. The underſtanding of this univerſal governor, which is ſufficient to direct the whole frame of nature, cannot be inſenſible of that difference of moral good or evil which even to us appears neceſſarily and eſſentially demonſtrable. To expect therefore that this Supreme Being will judge according to right, that is, according to the neceſſary nature of things; in other words, to fear that he will puniſh us if we act unreaſonably, and to hope for his favour if we be followers of truth and right; is the voice of reaſon, and not of ſuperſtition.

Superſtitious apprehenſions, ariſing in particular from timorouſneſs of temper, teach

teach men to fear they know not what, or to be afraid of God they know not why: to fear him, not as a juſt and righteous Judge, but merely as veſted with irreſiſtible power; to fear him, not ſo as by that fear to be deterred from unrighteous practices, but ſo, as to be perpetually commuting for a vicious life with the repetition of unprofitable ceremonies without number. Superſtitions founded upon cuſtomary tradition, teach men to be afraid of things which have no exiſtence; or of beings which have no power and dominion over us; to place religion in practices which have no tendency to virtue; to lay ſtreſs upon opinions which have no ſenſe, or no truth in them; upon things, whereof no man can give a rational account, or, in St. Peter's language, "give an anſwer to any one that "aſketh a reaſon of the hope," or of the fear, "that is in him." Superſtitions derived from political fiction, teach men to make religion conſiſt in parties and factions; in things which, in different countries, are contrary to each other, and in the ſame country contrary at different times; in things which promote not at all the honour of God, or univerſal meekneſs

meekneſs and good will towards men; but on the contrary, ſometimes are directly deſtructive both of truth and charity.

Inſtances of all theſe ſeveral kinds of ſuperſtitions in the heathen world, were their worſhipping fictitious deities, inſtead of the great God and governor of the univerſe, of whom by the light of nature and reaſon they were not ignorant: and more particularly, their mixing ſometimes barbarous and cruel, ſometimes licentious and impure rites, even amongſt their ſacred and religious performances. In the Jewiſh nation, the general and prevailing ſuperſtition always was, their relying upon outward forms and ceremonies (which ought not indeed to be left undone) and laying the ſtreſs of religion upon them more than upon "the weightier matters of the law," juſtice, mercy, and fidelity; of which all external purifications were but ſhadows and memorials. In the chriſtian world, inſtances of no leſs ſhameful ſuperſtitions, are, men's departing from the everlaſting goſpel, which requires us to "worſhip "him that made heaven and earth;" and ſetting up the worſhip of the hoſt, and

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of the bleſſed virgin, and of angels, and ſaints, and relicks, and images: alſo relying upon indulgences, pilgrimages, proceſſions, maſſes for the dead, and the like: nay, and upon the moſt ridiculously extravagant abſurdities in belief; and the moſt inhuman perſecution and barbarities in practice. All which things have no foundation in reaſon nor any appearance of being commanded of God. The true religion of Chriſt, as taught by himſelf and his apoſtles, has nothing of this ſort in it; requiring nothing of us, but this moſt reaſonable ſervice, that in expectation of a righteous judgment to come, we continually worſhip the God of the univerſe; living in ſobriety, righteouſneſs, and charity towards all men; and making conſtant acknowledgement of the divine goodneſs and compaſſion, in receiving ſinners to repentance through the mediation of Chriſt.

And this is the ſecond great or characteriſtic mark, by which religion and ſuperſtition may be diſtinguiſhed from each other. As they differ entirely in their ground and foundation, ſo do they likewiſe in their effects. By their fruits ye ſhall know them. Religion, which

is founded in truth, always makes men impartially inquiſitive after truth, lovers of reaſon, meek, gentle, patient, willing to be informed: ſuperſtition, on the contrary, naturally makes men blind and paſſionate, deſpiſers of reaſon, careleſs in inquiring after truth, haſty, cenſorious, contentious, and impatient of inſtruction. Religion teaches men to be exactly juſt, equitable, and charitable towards all men: ſuperſtition, on the contrary, frequently puts men upon undervaluing the eternal rules of morality, and upon preferring the intereſt of particular ſects and parties, the prevalency of ſome uncertain opinions, and the practice of ſome needleſs ceremonies, before the unalterable precepts of the everlaſting law and the everlaſting goſpel. Laſtly, true religion, the religion of nature in general, and the religion of Chriſt in particular, by ſecuring the belief of a future judgment, tends greatly to promote the happineſs of nations and good governments, in obliging the conſciences of men to real fidelity, juſtice, and the ſincere practice of every virtue, which the very beſt human laws can but imperfectly ſecure, by compelling merely the external action:

but

but ſuperſtition, on the contrary, frequently produces wars, and tumults, and perſecutions, and tyrannies without end; there being nothing ſo wicked, which men of ſuperſtitious principles will not think pious and neceſſary, and which men of no principles will not upon occaſion bring themſelves to ſubmit to.

I ſhall conclude this diſcourſe, with obſerving that there are two particulars, wherein true religion, the religion taught by Chriſt himſelf (for the religion profeſſed by many nations who call themſelves chriſtians, is palpably nothing but ſuperſtition) the true religion, I ſay, as taught by Chriſt himſelf, has in two particulars principally, by men who receive not the goſpel, been objected to as encouraging ſuperſtition. One is, that it teaches men to be obſtinate and wilful, in parting with all advantages, even with life itſelf, for the ſake of religion. The other is, that by teaching men to deſpiſe the world, it hinders them from attending to the good of the public. But the anſwer to both theſe objections is not difficult. Without a ſtedfaſtneſs which cannot be moved by temporal inconveniencies, there is no virtue to

be depended upon, in natural religion, any more than in chriſtian: is therefore all virtue, nothing but ſuperſtition? And as to deſpiſing the world, in the ſenſe of withdrawing from the buſineſs of the world, chriſtianity no where teaches this, but only in times and places of general perſecution. In other caſes, deſpiſing the world, does not ſignify deſpiſing the buſineſs of the world, or neglecting to attend the public good, but deſpiſing all temptations to the wickedneſs of the world, the temptations of lawleſs pleaſure, the temptations of unjuſt gains, the temptations of corrupt ambition. Theſe only, are, in the ſcripture-ſenſe, that world which is an enemy to God.

SER-

SERMON X.

ON THE SHORTNESS AND UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE.

2 SAMUEL XIX, 34.

And Barzillai ſaid unto the king, how long have I to live, that I ſhould go up with the king unto Jeruſalem?

DAVID had ſome time ſince been driven into exile by his ſon Abſalom, who had not only baſely uſurped his throne, but intended violence to his

perſon, and was forced to ſeek his ſafety by flying his country. Barzillai was one of thoſe who brought him proviſion in the wilderneſs for the ſupport and refreſhment of himſelf and his attendants, when they were almoſt ſpent with their long journey and faſting.

Abſalom's army was now defeated, and himſelf ſlain by the hands of Joab, and David on return to take poſſeſſion of his throne and kingdom. He could not however preſently forget the diſtreſs and danger he had been driven to; nor was he inſenſible of the relief he had found in a barren deſart from the humanity and friendſhip of this generous man. And, as a teſtimony of his gratitude and reſpect to him, he invites him to partake in his preſent honour and happineſs, as he had been ſuch a friend to him in his late diſtreſs and adverſity.

Barzillai excuſes himſelf from accepting the honour and preferment David intended him in the words of the text, "How long have I to live, that I ſhould "go up with the king to Jeruſalem."

The reflection on the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of his life; and the near views of

of death and another world, ſet him quite above the pleaſures, the profits, or the honours of this life, and inſpired him with a noble contempt of what the world calls pomp and greatneſs. The ſame thought, if we would perſuade ourſelves to admit and indulge it, would, in ſome degree at leaſt, have the ſame influence on our temper and conduct. If we conſider ſeriouſly how ſhort the duration of human life is, neither the "luſt of the "fleſh, nor the luſt of the eye, nor the "pride of life," would have any great or commanding influence over us. And really it is ſtrangely unaccountable by what artifice we can avoid this thought if we think at all; for what is our life? It is but as a vapour which appeareth for a little time, and then vaniſheth away. One portion of time, one generation of men paſſeth away, and another cometh, and there is none abiding. The day no ſooner dawns upon us, and the pleaſing light ſalutes our eyes, but it draws to an end, and is quickly cloſed in darkneſs. The ſummer ſeaſon entertains us for a while with its various delights, and brings forth innumerable creatures for

our uſe, both of the animal and vegetable kind; but no ſooner has it brought them forth but it periſheth itſelf, and winter ſpreads her hoary mantle upon the earth. And thus days, and months, and years ſoon paſs away, one after another, in a ſwift ſucceſſion, and we are borne down by the rapid ſtream of time towards that ocean from which we ſhall never return.

"How long have I to live?"

Barzillai does not aſk this queſtion from any ſolicitude to know the exact term of his life; as it is certain he could have no expectation that David was able to inform him. "It was not to gratify a "fooliſh curioſity; it was not to feed "himſelf with uncertain hopes; but to "check a vain ambition after worldly "honour and greatneſs in himſelf, and "to excuſe his refuſal of David's kind "offer of them to him."

And yet there is a curioſity in the mind of man to know thoſe things that are hidden from him, and ſearch after what with all his ſearch he can have no rational hope of finding out: for there is a thick veil ſpread over futurity, through which

which no mortal eye can pierce. We know not what ſhall be on the morrow; and God has purpoſely concealed the knowledge of it from us. If every man knew the exact meaſure of his days, this would tempt ſome perſons to defer a neceſſary preparation for death; and terrify others with a ſudden expectation of it. It would perſuade ſome to neglect religion, which is the moſt important buſineſs of life, and others to neglect their worldly affairs and concerns, which ought to be minded in their proper place, though they are undoubtedly of inferior concern and moment. And therefore, that all men may be awakened to a ſerious regard for religion, and an everlaſting ſtate, and yet not be called off from giving a due attention to ſecular concerns; that all may be engaged to prepare for death, and yet none be terrified with the ſudden expectation of it, our wiſe creator has not ſeen fit to *tell out* juſt the ſame number of days, and months, and years to us all; but has diſpenſed life, and time, in ſuch different and unequal portions, as that no man may know the certain meaſure of his days, or

be able to conclude when the period of his life will come.

Theſe words of Barzillai then are to be conſidered as the language of true wiſdom, and not of criminal curioſity, as containing a juſt eſtimate of human life in reſpect of its ſhortneſs and uncertainty. In this view it was a matter of indifference to him which was the place of his habitation: whether he had his reſidence in a court or a cottage, but only that the latter would afford him more leiſure and greater opportunity to prepare for another world. He had learned that leſſon which Moſes prays to be taught, "ſo to "number his days as to apply his heart "unto wiſdom." And this is what we ſhould all endeavour to learn; for, though to ſearch after the preciſe time of our lives would argue a fooliſh preſumption, yet to make a juſt calculation of our abode in this world, ſo far as our own obſervation and the experience of others can help us to do it, and that in order to apply it in the beſt manner we can to the great end of living, is certainly a great point of wiſdom, and will greatly contribute to our advantage and happineſs.

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We ſhould conſider not only what is the buſineſs appointed us to do, but what is the ſeaſon appointed us to do it in, that thereby we may be the better induced to improve it.

There is an art of numbering our days, as well as uſing and employing them well, and, by underſtanding the former, we ſhall be the more effectually engaged to ſtudy the latter.

The general term of human life is three or fourſcore years. "The days of our "years are threeſcore and ten, and if by "reaſon of ſtrength, they be fourſcore years, "yet is their ſtrength labour and ſorrow; "for it is ſoon cut off, and we flee away." And if we conſider, how much we have already lived of this term of years, and how many fall ſhort of it to one that reaches to it; if we conſider the natural weakneſs and feebleneſs of our conſtitution, by which it will ſoon decay of itſelf, if it ſhould not be broken by diſtempers; if we recollect what innumerable accidents our lives are continually expoſed to, we ſhall ſoon underſtand that we have but a very ſhort portion of time to look for, and none at all to boaſt

of, or preſume upon. We know there is an appointed time to man upon earth, but the book of the divine decrees was never intended to be publiſhed in our world. And if we caſt up the account of our lives with all the exactneſs we are able, the ſum total will be this, our time is ſhort, and to-morrow it may be no more.

When we are thus calculating the duration of our lives, we ſhould not confine our reckoning to this low ſtate of being, but ſtretch our thoughts on to a future world, and take our whole exiſtence into the account. By this means we ſhall learn to take a truer and juſter eſtimate of the preſent momentary life. The proſpect of eternity will make this world appear but as a vapour, and the age of man as leſs than nothing: will contract our views of time and life into a narrower compaſs, and engage us to uſe and improve this ſhort ſeaſon aright: to employ our preſent temporal life to the great purpoſes of preparing for that which is future and eternal.

From the words thus explained we may obſerve, that the ſhortneſs and uncertain-

certainty of human life is a very proper conſideration to be put in the ſcales againſt all the temptations that attend it. This is the direct uſe that is made of our text: how long have we to live, that we ſhould be eagerly ambitious after temporal honours and dignity, graſp at earthly riches, or be attached to ſenſual pleaſures? When we conſider how ſoon we muſt depart out of this world, theſe muſt loſe all their boaſted charms. It is fooliſh to ſet our affections on things which we know we cannot ſtay long to enjoy. Since we are departing hence, we ſhould endeavour after greater abſtraction from the body and the world; ſhould withdraw our affections from theſe things beforehand; ſit as looſe from them as may be, ſo that we may be able with better decency and compoſure to take our leave of them at laſt. We ſhould keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the iſſues of life: ſhould take care they be not immoderately attached to any ſenſible objects, not only becauſe an inordinate affection for theſe things will make it exceedingly painful to us to part with them, but becauſe it will

will hinder us from ſecuring better in their room when they are taken from us, is it for men to labour and toil, to wear out life in the purſuit of thoſe things that periſh almoſt as ſoon as they have obtained them? How much greater folly is it to neglect thoſe infinitely more durable riches and happineſs for the ſake of poſſeſſing theſe periſhing enjoyments? Now certainly men do not remember how long they have to live, who ſpend their lives entirely in ſuch a vain and idle chace. Would the covetous man employ all his time in gathering together ſilver and gold, and loading himſelf with thick clay, if he conſidered ſeriouſly how ſhort the time is allotted to him to poſſeſs all this? That he is deſigned for immortality, and is travelling with ſpeed to his eternal home, and that none of theſe things ſhall follow him thither. Would the ambitious man climb with ſo much eagerneſs, and labour to arrive at the ſtations of honour and dignity, if he were now and then in imagination to viſit the ſolemn regions of the dead, and take a proſpect of futurity, and conſider within himſelf how ſoon he muſt be ſunk

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to a level with the meaneſt and moſt contemptible? What great attraction or charms would there be in ſenſual pleaſure, if a man would recollect for what a moment they endure? And, that while he ſpends his whole time in the purſuit of them, he does but thruſt them away from him, and make way for a more ſpeedy death? In a word, the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of our abode in this world is a conſideration, which if we admit and attend to it, will cure us of an overfondneſs for any thing in it.

This ſame conſideration would alſo be an effectual means of animating us to diligence and ſerioufneſs in preparing for another world.

This great and good man conſidered juſtly that he had matters of infinitely greater conſequence to mind than to run after the pleaſures of a court, or ſeek after temporal honour and dignity. He had a journey to another world to take, and was ſolicitous to prepare for his awful departure.

The continuance of our lives for any term is altogether precarious, and therefore

fore it is our higheſt wiſdom to apply ourſelves to the great work and buſineſs of life, and diſpatch it with a becoming diligence. Becauſe, if we delay ſetting about it, or are negligent in it, our lives may draw to an end before the great work of life is finiſhed. It is true indeed, Barzillai was an old man, and it is no wonder, ſome perhaps may ſay, that the conſideration of the ſhortneſs of life ſhould prevail with a man juſt at the end of it. It is not ſurprizing that he ſhould think it time to prepare for another world when he was already advanced to the very border of it. And, when our lives draw ſo near to a period, we will admit this a proper ſeaſon to entertain the conſideration, and be influenced by it.

Now, thus much may be granted, that it muſt have peculiar force and ſtrength with thoſe who are in the decline of life. But it is a reflection that ought to prevail with the youngeſt among us that is capable of attending to it. Religion is a buſineſs of too great importance to be crouded into a little corner of life, and begun only when we come to the end of it, and think ourſelves fit for nothing elſe. We cannot pretend that we

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are too young to die, or to be judged; for as ſoon as we are capable of diſcerning the difference between good and evil, we are accountable creatures; is it not then very abſurd to think we are too young to prepare for death and judgment? It is dangerous to be careleſs and negligent in an affair of ſuch infinite conſequence, that demands our freſheſt ſtrength, our moſt active ſpirits. For (not to obſerve that the heart will grow more incapable of reliſhing and underſtanding the great arguments and truths of religion, the longer a man continues unmindful of them) what ſecurity have we that we ſhall live to the ſuppoſed ſeaſon we ſet apart for the ſervice of our God, and preparation for an happy immortality? How many thouſands die before they reach one half of the common term of human life? And we cannot be inſenſible of the number that are cut off in the midſt of health, and ſtrength, and youth, and all the encouraging ſymptoms of a long life. Many of our younger, as well as elder friends, who were gay, and flouriſhing, blooming with health and vigour, not a great while ago, have unexpectedly met the irreſiſti-

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ble tyrant, been taken captive by the univerſal conqueror, and numbered among the ſolemn dead; and it is far from being impoſſible, or improbable, but ſome of us of this claſs may very ſoon increaſe the awful number. Which of us ſhall receive the firſt ſummons from a world where we dearly love to dwell, to the unknown, untried, eternal ſtate of being, is not for us, on this dull ſtage of mortality, to determine. God has for wiſe ends concealed the important ſecret in his own boſom. May it therefore be our great concern to prepare to obey the ſolemn call, when it ſhall pleaſe the great Lord of life and death to ſummon us to his tribunal! Young perſons in particular ſhould learn hence not to be too confident of life, but act with conſideration and prudence. While they are purſuing the pleaſures and gaieties of life, let them not forget they are mortal, dying, accountable creatures. And be ſollicitous to ſecure the ſubſtantial pleaſures of virtue and religion, which tend to ennoble and exalt the mind, will be an anchor to the ſoul, ſure and ſtedfaſt amidſt the various changing ſcenes of life, will lay a ſolid foundation for a calm

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and quiet death, and eternal joy in the preſence of God, the ſociety of angels, and the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect. Which may God of his great mercy grant! Amen.

SER-

SERMON XI.

ON AGUR'S PRAYER.

PROV. XXX. 8, 9.

Give me neither poverty, nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me: leſt I be full, and deny thee, and ſay, who is the Lord? or leſt I be poor, and ſteal, and take the name of my God in vain.

IN this paſſage it is plainly intimated, that the middle ſtate of life is, generally at leaſt, more ſafe and eligible than either want or ſuperfluity: with reſpect to

to its being better than narrow and penurious circumſtances, there can be no diſpute; but that it ſhould be preferred to great wealth and abundance, will, I am perſuaded, appear a very wild and extravagant paradox to the giddy and unthinking, who judge of things at firſt ſight, without enquiring into their nature, or conſidering their conſequences: for is it not a deſirable thing, will ſuch ſay, to be not only placed above poverty, and enjoy the neceſſaries and conveniences, but the delights alſo of human life? to be perſons of figure, power, and influence? and, conſequently, capable of ſerving our friends, and relieving the indigent and miſerable, in a more large and extenſive degree? Can a condition, which may not only be ſo agreeable but uſeful, be miſchievous and deſtructive to mankind? It certainly may; nay, it actually has had this fatal conſequence in many caſes. And perſons who have behaved with honour and an unblemiſhed reputation in moderate circumſtances; nay, who have preſerved their virtue, and manifeſted great preſence and ſtrength of mind under the buffetings of adverſe fortune; have been captivated and bewitched

witched by the charms of an affluent proſperity, and the pleaſures it brings along with it, and ſunk into an indolent and diſſolute life: which ſhows us that there is not only danger, but eminent and peculiar danger in it, when it happens to ſome particular tempers; and in general, where there is not a lively influence of religion and virtue, and firmneſs and reſolution of mind.

But I proceed to conſider the words of the text more particularly, and ſhall, firſt, explain and illuſtrate what the text ſays concerning the danger of a ſtate of great riches and ſuperfluity on the one hand, and of want and poverty on the other. I ſhall take them juſt in the order in which it repreſents them to us. And,

Firſt; For the danger that attends a ſtate of great riches and ſuperfluity, which is expreſſed thus, "leſt I be full "and deny thee, and ſay who is the "Lord?" To deny God, ſignifies in ſcripture, ſometimes, to act as if there was no righteous governor and judge of mankind, to whom they are accountable, as well as directly to diſown his being and providence: but I cannot apprehend this

this to be the meaning of the phraze here, becauſe in this large view there is more danger of denying God to men in high and flouriſhing circumſtances, than what every other ſtate of life affords, which has in it equal temptations to vice and immorality. I ſhall take it therefore in a ſtricter ſenſe than this, and yet not in the moſt confined ſenſe of all, and enquire briefly, what peculiar danger there is ariſing from riches and plenty, of "irreligion and prophaneneſs, a diſregard and contempt of providence, and other crimes of a like nature, that are commited more directly and immediately againſt God himſelf."

And, in general, the fundamental danger of all lies here, that in the height of proſperity, men are apt to be careleſs and inconſiderate. Chearfulneſs, and a relaxation from ſeverer ſtudies and contemplations, is not only innocent but neceſſary, in the preſent mixed and imperfect ſtate of human nature: but in an affluent proſperity, when every thing about us is gay, and has a ſmiling aſpect, we are too apt to contract an habitual levity of mind, and neglect all grave and ſerious reflections. A continued ſucceſ-

ſion

ſion of pomp and pleaſure fixes our attention, and diverts it from greater and more important concerns. Wiſe men, indeed, who have impartially eſtimated the true worth of things, look upon riches and honours only as ſuperfluities and outward decorations of life, and not as eſſential to human happineſs; and value themſelves upon them no farther, than as they enable them to do greater good to their fellow creatures; but the fooliſh and unthinking are made giddy by their proſperity: the natural conſequence of which is, that they muſt be an eaſy prey to all the peculiar temptations of their wealthy and exalted ſtate; and it will appear, particularly, from the following conſiderations, that they are in great danger of the vices implied in the text. For,

When the mind is thus weakened and diſſolved, and its faculties enervated and broken, when the moderation of men's tempers is deſtroyed, and they are become thoughtleſs and inconſiderate, which the indolence and gaiety, and various little trifling entertainments of a proſperous condition have a natural tendency to effect; it is no wonder, if they pride

themſelves in their riches, as their ultimate happineſs; and for want of reflecting on the inſtability of all human affairs, think themſelves ſelf-ſufficient; and loſe that juſt ſenſe which they ought to have of the ſovereignty of their maker, and their abſolute and neceſſary dependance upon him. It is no wonder at all, if, by being complimented and flattered, their vanity be raiſed ſo high, as to make them regardleſs of that ſupreme being, from whom all their abundance, honour, and greatneſs flows; nor if having conceived an extraordinary opinion of their own merit upon the account of their ſhining circumſtances, they neglect to pay their due homage and worſhip to the Deity, and live unmindful of his benefits. This is, in effect, to deny not only God's government of the world, but his abſolute perfection, and conſequently his being: it is to deny our obligations to him as the author of every thing we enjoy, and his right to our ſervices. The language of ſuch a conduct is, "Who is the Lord that we ſhould obey his voice?" And that all this diſingenuity and ingratitude towards the greateſt and beſt of beings is a conſequence that, it may juſtly be feared,

ed, will ſpring from riches and greatneſs, when men are immoderately fond of them, and for want of due conſideration, grown preſumptuous and arrogant, experience abundantly teſtifies.

For there are too many, to whom a time of affliction is a ſeaſon of ſome ſort of piety, becauſe then their ſufferings put them in mind of their ſins, and the hope of deliverance makes them, to appearance at leaſt, humble and ſubmiſſive to their Maker; but when things go on ſmoothly, and anſwer to the heighth of their wiſhes, they ſeem to think they have no farther need of him, and are ſufficient for their own happineſs, without his interpoſition. The diſtinguiſhing goodneſs of God, in their continued plenty and abundance, is unheeded, becauſe it is conſtant and uninterrupted. What a perverſe creature is man! he wiſhes not to be miſerable, and yet forgets the author of his happineſs, becauſe he has not allotted him ſome mixtures of evil and miſery with it! Or rather ſince this is not human nature, which abhors ingratitude, but a vile and melancholy depravation of it; what will not a man do

when proſperity has made him wanton and inſolent! But farther,

It is more evident, that affluent circumſtances are attended with great temptations to luxury, and the immoderate purſuits of pleaſure. Plenty too naturally begets exceſs: it has the means of it in its power, cuſtom to countenance it, and generally miniſters of vice enow at hand to prompt and excite to it. And luxury infeebles the mind, deſtroys every thing that is great and generous, and indiſpoſes for all rational exerciſes and improvements. It naturally heightens and inflames the ſenſual paſſions, and leads to the purſuit of irregular pleaſures. For what can that man have to reſtrain him from any enjoyment that his inclinations prompt him to, who has wealth, power, and influence to command them, and the opportunity perhaps of gratifying his corrupt appetites in a private manner, ſo as to avoid, in a great meaſure, that ſhame and infamy which juſtly attends it; what, I ſay, can reaſonably be ſuppoſed to reſtrain ſuch a one from indulging his corrupt deſires, if he has no regard to reaſon, conſcience, and the authority of his Maker?

A ſenſe

A ſenſe of God indeed, as the inſpector and dreadful avenger of his wickedneſs, will create great uneaſineſs and confuſion in his mind, and abate his reliſh of unlawful enjoyments. But can we think that when he is immerſed in ſenſual pleaſures, and given up to vicious purſuits, he will ſuffer his imagination to be continually haunted and ſcared by ſuch ungrateful truths, if it be in his power to prevent it? will he not endeavour to root out of his mind thoſe diſagreeable ideas, which are a conſtant vexation and torment to him? So that by his vices he is neceſſarily prejudiced in the favour of atheiſm, and from wiſhing that there was no God, may come, by degrees, to imagine there is none; or, at leaſt, which will ſerve the turn of his [illegible]* inclinations and pleaſures full as well, that he does not exerciſe a particular providence over the moral world, nor take account of their conduct. And as the pomp and ſplendour of his greatneſs continually dazzles his underſtanding, as the levity of his mind, and the gay amuſements his riches furniſh him with, ſcarce allow him any opportunity for cloſe and ſerious thinking, and his high

ſpirits bear him up againſt ſudden and occaſional reflections, he has, upon theſe accounts, a better chance than other men of being confirmed in his atheiſtical ſentiments; and of hindering ſober reaſonings about the being and providence of God, and a judgment to come, from faſtening upon him; which, if they were not ſome way or other diverted, muſt make the ſtouteſt heart tremble in the midſt of all its carnal delights: I ſay indeed a better chance, becauſe to a man of ſuch a depraved diſpoſition it appears under that character; but the real truth is, that his affluence and luxury only tend to blind and pervert his judgment the more, and conſequently to harden him in atheiſm and irreligion.

Thus have I ſhown the temptations ariſing from ſuperfluous wealth and greatneſs, to deny God in the ſtrict ſenſe of the word, and act with diſreſpect and ingratitude towards his providence.

Suffer me now briefly to mention a few other vices of the moſt malignant and fatal conſequence to mankind, to which it has peculiar temptations. And the

Firſt

Firſt is pride and vanity. When men are elated by their diſtinguiſhing circumſtances, they eaſily fancy themſelves to be very ſignificant perſons, and poſſeſſed of extraordinary merit: and this vain opinion, which is continually fed by their mercenary dependents and flatterers, among whom it is ſcarcely poſſible for any man to preſerve a juſt opinion of himſelf, and of human nature, diſcovers itſelf in every part of their conduct, and in all their appearances. Not but that it may be very innocent and rational for perſons of figure and ſubſtance to allow themſelves ſuch diverſions, and make ſuch an appearance in public, as would be very improper and criminal in thoſe who enjoy but moderate fortunes; nor would I be ſuppoſed to condemn that external ſhew and magnificence, which is a badge of civil honour, and neceſſary to diſtinguiſh the ſeveral ranks of men one from another, or maintain the reſpect due to their different characters. But for any to pride themſelves, and fancy that there is a proper merit in dreſs and equipage, or in the prodigality and glittering pomp of greatneſs, is a vice that argues a very low and degenerate turn of mind; and whenever

ſuch a temper prevails, it will take men off from improving in thoſe moral diſpoſitions and habits, which alone conſtitute true greatneſs, and are the only real excellency of a reaſonable being.

Farther; Riches miniſter to ambition, which is one of the moſt irregular paſſions of human nature, and attended with the moſt miſchievous effects: and in proportion to our vanity, and the high views we entertain for ourſelves, they have a tendency to beget in us an unbecoming and inſolent contempt of others. For men are apt to think that there is ſo much reſpect due to their ſuperior circumſtances, as if they were of a different nature from their fellow-creatures, and originally formed in a higher order of being; and thus they ſacrifice all the rights of mankind reſulting from their natural equality, to an accidental advantage, which has no merit at all in it otherwiſe than as it is enjoyed with condeſcenſion and benevolence, and a ſubſerviency to the general good.

Finally; Men are too eaſily tempted, by their riches and power, to be imperious and tyrannical, and to abuſe thoſe great talents which God hath put into their

their hands for the good of others, to oppreſſion and injuſtice; by which means they moſt wickedly pervert the wiſe ſcheme of Providence, and are more extenſively miſchievous and hurtful, in proportion to their greater capacity for doing good. I now proceed,

Secondly; To conſider what the text ſays concerning the danger of a ſtate of want and poverty; "leſt I be poor and ſteal, and take the name of my God in vain." The vices to which ſtrait and penurious circumſtances of life are here repreſented as having peculiar temptations, are, theft, and taking the name of God in vain, by which is moſt probably meant perjury. And it is very evident, that the temptation to theſe crimes is, in the nature of the thing, much ſtronger when perſons are embaraſſed with difficulties, and oppreſſed by poverty, than it can be when they enjoy a ſuperfluity of riches, or even a moderate fortune, which is ſufficient to procure for them all neceſſaries and proper conveniences, and places them above care and anxiety. And as it appears likewiſe, in fact, that the guilty this way are moſt frequently neceſſitous people, who have either no

employment to follow, or elſe had rather violate the moſt ſacred obligations of conſcience, than be forced to maintain themſelves by honeſt labour; I ſhall ſay no more to this point directly, but enquire into the cauſes why the poor ſo eaſily give way to temptations of this kind.

It is undoubtedly owing, in a great meaſure, to the want of a good education: the advantage of this is unſpeakable; and nothing has a larger ſhare in forming the difference there is between one man and another, though originally of the ſame ſpecies of beings: it is this that diſtinguiſhes the politer parts of the world from the moſt ignorant and barbarous nation: for all mankind have the faculty of reaſon implanted in them by the great creator; but if it be not improved, it will never ſhew itſelf to advantage: by good culture it may be raiſed to a ſtate of great maturity and perfection; but if it be neglected, it will be overrun with ignorance and prejudice. Again, all men have a natural power to diſcern the difference between good and evil, and the ſolid grounds and foundations of morality; but, notwithſtanding this, if they are not taught and inſtructed, their notions

tions will be very imperfect, rude, and confuſed: now there is this defect, generally, in the education of the poorer ſort of people. They are trained up in a brutal ſtupidity. No care is taken to inſtil into their minds proper notions of God, and of his providence, of a judgment to come, and the difference between virtue and vice. And as they grow up thus wild, and without any good principles at leaſt, if they are not corrupted by bad examples, and have not imbibed a contempt of all religion, it is no wonder that they are diſſolute and extravagant in their practice: all which ſhews us the great uſe, I might almoſt ſay, abſolute neceſſity of a ſober and virtuous education, and of infuſing ſentiments of wiſdom and piety into children in their early years, and at the firſt dawn of reaſon: for their minds are then tender and flexible, free from prejudice and unruly paſſion, and equally ſuſceptible of good, as bad expreſſions: and it is generally obſerved, that perſons retain ſomewhat of the tincture that was given them in their education, all their lives after.

Another reaſon why poverty ſubjects men to the temptations intimated in the text is, that the poor are often not trained up regularly to any employment, by which they may get an honeſt livelihood; and for want of being inured to labour and induſtry, they contract a habit of idleneſs, than which nothing can be more detrimental to ſociety; for it is indeed the parent of all vices: to this particularly it may be aſcribed, that ſo many ſubſiſt by rapine and violence, and by abuſing and plundering their fellow-creatures.

Again; Perſons in ſuch low, mean circumſtances are often deſtitute of a ſenſe of ſhame, and regard to reputation, and, conſequently, have loſt one of the ſureſt guards of their virtue and integrity, and are eaſily led into the moſt abominable and injurious vices: and this is not only owing to their having never received any notions of decency in their education, but to the wrong cuſtom of the world. Poverty itſelf is looked upon as an object of contempt; and for a poor man to pretend to have any reputation to loſe, is too often matter of jeſt and ridicule: but this is certainly very impoli-

tic,

tic, as well as unjuſt; becauſe it is for the intereſt of ſociety to encourage a ſenſe of honour in every one that has a reaſonable nature, whatever his outward circumſtances may be. For it muſt be conſidered, that a regard to reputation, and a ſenſe of ſhame frequently prevail, where the awful notions of a Deity, and a providence, and a future ſtate, have little or no influence at all: and therefore, if theſe are deſtroyed, as they generally are in the wretched poor, by one or other, or both the methods abovementioned, and they think they cannot render themſelves more deſpicable by their wickedneſs, than they are already on account of their poverty; it is natural to ſuppoſe, that they may commit ſuch crimes as they would otherwiſe be ſhocked at the thought of.

And in this inſenſibility and indifference about the good or ill opinion of the world, in this lazineſs and averſion to labour, in this brutiſh ſtupidity, and thoſe corrupt and vicious ſentiments which they acquired from their education, they are confirmed by their wicked aſſociates, perſons for the moſt part of the ſame abandoned principles with themſelves:

ſelves: ſo that there is ſcarce a poſſibility of being reclaimed, but, on the other hand, it is highly probable they will be more and more encouraged and hardened in their vices.

Let me juſt mention another vice, that comes under the character of taking God's name in vain, which the poor are notoriouſly guilty of; and that is the practice of common ſwearing: to this, I know of no peculiar temptation from their poverty: and it appears, in fact, that there is none; becauſe it is very near, if not altogether as common among perſons of high rank and circumſtances, to the very great ſcandal of religion, and their own diſhonour. For it is a ſhameful thing that they ſhould indulge to ſo vulgar a vice; a vice, to which there is not the leaſt temptation; and which is a ſenſeleſs, inſignificant expletive in diſcourſe, that adds neither ſtrength nor beauty to it. And if they will not refrain, out of reſpect to the great God, who is infinitely their ſuperior and better, or from a dread of his vengeance; they ought at leaſt, out of good manners, to be aſhamed to continue any longer ſuch an infamous practice, to the offence of the

the ſobereſt and wiſeſt of their fellow-creatures, and in defiance of the laws of their country.

The chief uſe of what has been ſaid is to moderate our paſſions for riches and greatneſs, and preſerve us from envying thoſe who poſſeſs them. For, what is it we envy? why, perhaps ignorance, vice, and miſery, under a glittering and pompous appearance. The envied circumſtances, which are ſo highly the object of our admiration and deſire, may have corrupted the virtue of thoſe whom we think happy in the enjoyment of them, and, in conſequence, have deſtroyed their peace; ſo that they may languiſh amidſt all their plenty, and be diſtracted with innumerable cares; or elſe may be gay and thoughtleſs, or given up to riot and luxury. The generality of mankind are ſuch wild and inconſiderate creatures, and examine ſo little into the nature of things, that a fine outſide eaſily deceives them; ſo that they love, and admire, and conſequently envy, they know not what: whereas, if they would weigh matters impartially, their reaſon muſt inform them, that, to ſome tempers, the eaſe, lazineſs, and affluence of proſperity will admi-

adminiſter numberleſs temptations to vice and extravagance; and that, on the contrary, afflictions may be of great uſe when perſons cannot be brought to conſideration, or kept in tolerable order, any other way: and in ſuch caſes they would be led to think very differently from what they uſually do; to look upon the ſeeming evil as real good, and on proſperity as a real evil, notwithſtanding its flattering and deceitful appearances. Beſides, did they compare their own entire caſe with that of the perſons whom they are ſo apt to envy, they would often find the advantage to be on their own ſide. For the outward gaiety and ſplendor of proſperity, if it has corrupted the hearts and manners of its poſſeſſors, is a great misfortune, in compariſon of moderate, nay even of afflicted circumſtances of life, joined with a grave and conſiderate mind, regular paſſions, and a virtuous conduct. Add to this, that proſperity, to thoſe eſpecially who envy it in others, is likely to be attended with the moſt miſchievous and deſtructive conſequences. For what is the true object of their envy? Is it the capacity thoſe perſons enjoy of doing more good to their fellow-creatures?

No!

No! but the abundance, honour, pomp, and luxury of ſuch a ſtation: and if they are enamoured of theſe things, there is no ground to hope that they will guard againſt any faſhionable exceſſes, or abridge themſelves even of the moſt unmanly entertainments of a vain and luxurious age.

SER-

SERMON XII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

PROVERBS xxii. 6.

Holland

Train up a child in the way he ſhould go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

IN diſcourſing from theſe words, I propoſe to preſent the importance of a good education. And I ſhall conſider it; firſt, with regard to the perſons educated.

Second-

Secondly, with regard to their parents, in whoſe hands it is commonly entruſted. And laſtly, with regard to ſociety in general.

And firſt, if we conſider it in relation to thoſe, who are educated; we ſhall find, it produceth unſpeakable advantages. For though nature makes a conſiderable difference in the underſtandings and tempers of men, yet a much greater diſparity ariſeth from the different meaſures that are uſed in their education. Compare a ſavage that is juſt come from his native deſarts, to almoſt any one, that has been brought up in a civilized nation; and you will find the latter excels the former more than he himſelf does the brutal herd, though perhaps they were with equal capacities. Or, if in the nation, or even in the ſame family, you compare thoſe, that have enjoyed a good education, with others, about whom little or no care has been taken to improve their minds; the former in general, are ſo much finer and nobler creatures, that they ſcarce appear to be of the ſame ſpecies.

It is true, an extraordinary genius now and then makes a wonderful proficiency,

ciency, without any great advantages of education; while ſome, that have been trained up in the beſt manner, turn out vile and contemptible wretches. But we rarely meet with ſuch inſtances; and this is the reaſon why we admire them ſo much, when we happen to obſerve them. Beſides, there is little reaſon to doubt, but that he, who excels by the mere force of nature alone, would have excelled in a much higher degree, had nature been aſſiſted by a proper education. In like manner ſuch as become vicious, though in youth their minds were daily ſeaſoned with good inſtructions; might probably have been much worſe without them.

As in agriculture, it is requiſite, that the ground be fertile, the huſbandman ſkilful, and the ſeed good; ſo in education, natute anſwers to the ſoil; the teacher, to the huſbandman; and the inſtructions, that are adminiſtred, repreſent the ſeed; all theſe advantages have generally concurred in producing and forming the moſt excellent and celebrated men; and happy is the man in a peculiar degree, on whom heaven has beſtowed them all. But it is a great miſtake to imagine that an ordinary temper may not, by a bright manage-

management, be cured in a good measure of its natural defects. For as the beſt genius may be ſpoiled by negligence, ſo the worſt may be corrected by the application of a proper diſcipline. Thus careleſſneſs is puniſhed by diſappointment with regard to thoſe advantages which are eaſy to be gained; while diligence is rewarded with ſucceſs in difficult affairs.

Numberleſs are the inſtances, from which we may learn the abſolute neceſſity and great force of induſtry and art. A good ſoil will produce little that is uſeful, ſo long as it remains uncultivated; and the better it was in its own nature, the worſe it becomes by the huſband's neglect: on the other hand, art and labour often raiſe noble fruits from different ground. What vine or fruit-tree, if no care be taken of it, does not become wild and barren, which, if it had been pruned and managed, as it ought, would amply have recompenſed the pains of the planter; the horſe, that, if I may uſe the expreſſion, has been well educated, quietly ſubmits to the rein, and obeys his rider; but the ſteed that was not broke at a proper ſeaſon, uſually continues head-

ſtrong

ſtrong and fierce. And why ſhould we wonder at theſe things, when we often ſee the wildeſt animals rendered tame and tractable by ſkilful management.

But education, you will ſay, ſometimes fails of obtaining its end: ſo does medicine, ſo alſo does huſbandry, and almoſt every art; but ſtill they retain their value, becauſe in general they are highly uſeful, though they do not ſucceed, in every inſtance. We have this moreover to plead in favour of education, that though ſome natures may be ſo perverſe, that they cannot be wrought up by it to any great perfection; yet, had it not been for its influence upon them, they would probably have ſunk into worſe depravity. Beſides, it is no uncommon thing to call that a good education which in ſome material points had been very defective. If a man, for inſtance, was brought up in a ſober family, if beſides the common courſe of learning, he was taught the decencies of converſation and behaviour, and carefully inſtructed in ſome ſcheme of religious principles; ſuch a one, we ſay, had a good education; and ſo far indeed is well enough, but notwithſtanding all this,

this, it might be exceedingly faulty: his ſpirit was perhaps broken in youth by exceſſive ſeverity, or ſuffered to grow peeviſh and wanton by too much indulgence: or, it may be, he was forced upon ſome employment which neither ſuited his genius nor inclination. In ſhort, we cannot determine whether a man has been educated well or not, unleſs we attend to many circumſtances which are difficult to be obſerved; and which, however trivial they may appear in themſelves, are of great weight in forming his manners and determining his character. In the mean time how unjuſt is it to repreſent education as of ſmall effect upon account of thoſe miſcarriages, which in truth were owing originally to ſome error in the management of it?

But it is atteſted by almoſt univerſal experience, that when a man has either none or a bad education, he is the wildeſt animal upon the face of the earth; but when he is bleſt with a good genius and proper cultivation, he becomes a moſt divine and excellent creature. I ſhall not therefore ſcruple to pronounce, that a right education is no leſs, and it cannot be more conducive to virtue, than

virtue

virtue is to the happineſs of life. As to outward advantages, they are comparatively mean in themſelves, and of uncertain continuance. Wealth is uſeful, but obnoxious to fortune. The inſtability of fame detracts from its value. For a man to be well deſcended is honourable, not ſo much to himſelf, as to his anceſtors. Health is deſirable, but very precarious. Beauty excites admiration, but ſoon decays. Human ſtrength is inconſiderable at beſt, and ſubject to be impaired by age and ſickneſs. Any of theſe may leave us before, and none of them can attend us beyond, the approaching period of this earthly being. Wiſdom and virtue, the noble fruits of a good education, are the only ſecure and immortal poſſeſſions. Theſe can neither be affected by accidents, nor taken away by force, nor blaſted by malice, nor withered by time, nor impaired by age. We may carry them with us through all the changes to which mortality is expoſed; and after they have made us happy in this life, they will paſs along with us through the valley of death; and conſtitute our glory and happineſs for ever. Education therefore extends its bleſſed

effects through the whole of our exiſtence, and begins that felicity which can never come to an end.

Thus I have ſhewn the importance of a good education, as it regards the perſons to whom it is applied. I proceed now,

Secondly; To conſider it with relation to their parents, in whoſe hands the care of it is commonly entruſted.

In as many reſpects as parents may be affected by the behaviour of their children, upon ſo many accounts it concerns them to look well to their education, upon which their behaviour chiefly depends. Now as thoſe are worſe than brutes who do not deſire the welfare of their children as heartily as their own; ſo thoſe muſt be ſtupid to the laſt degree who can think it poſſible for them to be vicious and happy at the ſame time. Accordingly we find few or none, even amongſt perſons of indifferent characters, who do not deſire their children ſhould be good; and regret it as a ſore misfortune to themſelves, if they prove otherwiſe. And in virtuous and ſenſible ſpirits, theſe affections are much ſtronger. To a mind that is not void of humanity, it muſt certainly

certainly afford unſpeakable pleaſure to reflect, that it has been the inſtrument of making any of its fellow-creatures virtuous and happy. For, if to have raiſed an edifice, or formed a lifeleſs ſtatue, is matter of ſatisfaction; what is it to have wrought a living ſoul into its due form, and aſſiſted an immortal ſpirit in attaining that perfection of which its Maker has rendered it capable? Eſpecially, when a man has done this for his own offspring, who are dearer to him than almoſt any thing in the world beſides.

I believe indeed it is impoſſible to imagine a more lively joy than that which dilates the heart of an affectionate parent, when he attends to the laudable conduct of his own children; and this joy is doubled upon him, when he conſiders it as the reward of heaven, for the pains and expence he had beſtowed upon them in their education. How muſt he be delighted to obſerve them walking in the ways of integrity and virtue; reſpecting his own friends and being reſpected by them; and growing in favour daily with God and man? What ſatisfaction muſt it yield him under a ſenſe of his mortality to be comfortably aſſured, that

they who are to inherit his name and fortune will not abuſe the one, nor diſgrace the other by wickedneſs and folly: and to ſee them ſo well confirmed in habits of virtue, that he has good reaſon to hope they would continue to behave well, though it ſhould pleaſe God to deprive them of the benefit of his own care and counſel? The tender emotions of joy ſuch happy parents feel, I believe, they themſelves would find it a hard taſk fully to deſcribe.

Nor is it eaſy to repreſent on the other hand, the anguiſh of a parent's heart, pierced with the miſcarriages of a ſon or a daughter. But we may form ſome notion how heavy this grief lies upon the mind, from the miſerable effects it often produceth. For upon this account ſome have worn out a wretched life in continual dejection; ſome have laid violent hands upon themſelves; and others have been bowed to the grave with the very weight of their ſorrows. Nor can any juſt thought remove theſe afflictions; unleſs by having uſed a proper care in educating their children, they had done all in their power to prevent their misfortunes: if they are conſcious they have been

been guilty of any negligence with regard to them, they muſt be ſtung with the ſharpeſt remorſe.

Upon the manner in which a parent brings up his children it moſtly depends, whether they ſhall be ſcourges or bleſſings to himſelf, when they are grown to maturity. By ſeaſoning their youthful minds with the principles of generoſity and gratitude, he will diſpoſe them to repay the obligations he has laid upon them, by attending and miniſtring to him with care and chearfulneſs in the decline of his life. But if he trains them up in the maxims of avarice, they will be apt to regard him as an encumbrance upon their hands, and a bar to their happineſs, as ſoon as he becomes uſeleſs to their fortunes. If he indulges them when young in ſloth and prodigality, they will perhaps proceed to ſuch a degree of extravagance, as he may neither be willing nor able to ſupport. It is therefore ſurpriſing to obſerve the ſtupid negligence of ſome parents with regard to their children: they ſuffer them to contract a fondneſs for brutal pleaſures, and take no pains to inſpire them with a love of frugality and temperance. When

ſuch children arrive at the age of manhood (for they ſeldom reach the years of diſcretion) they deſpiſe a regular and ſober life, and plunge into groſs and abominable ſenſuality. Then, when the parent ſees and feels the bad conſequence of it, he begins to repent too late of his own negligence. What it would be cruel to ſay to him in ſuch a circumſtance, may yet be a ſeaſonable warning to others; that by due and timely care in educating his children, he might probably have prevented their wickedneſs, which is not now in his power to correct.

What has been ſaid may ſuffice to ſhew the importance of education, both to children and their parents. It remains,

Laſtly, that we conſider it with regard to ſociety in general.

Youth is the nurſery out of which ſociety muſt daily be ſupplied with new members to fill up the places of thoſe that die. And ſince the conduct of men depends principally upon their education, and the welfare of a ſtate upon the manners and conduct of thoſe that compoſe it; it is plain the condition of any ſociety muſt become in a ſhort time bet-

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ter or worſe, in proportion as its youth are educated well or ill. Hence in ſome of the wiſeſt nations parents have not been ſuffered to train up their children according to their own fancy; but in a certain method preſcribed by the law, from which they might not depart without being liable to a ſevere penalty. And, indeed, it was highly reaſonable the ſtate ſhould take ſome cognizance of an affair in which its intereſt is ſo nearly concerned. Thus in Sparta the public directed and provided for the education of children; and he that refuſed to go through the eſtabliſhed forms was thought unworthy to be a member of the commonwealth, and excluded from all the privileges of a citizen.

The Perſians alſo did not leave it wholly to the diſcretion of parents in what manner their children ſhould be educated. But whereas in other nations it was thought ſufficient that murder, theft, adultery, and the like ſhould be forbidden by the laws, and puniſhed when committed; among them care was taken to prevent ſuch crimes, by training up their youth in ſuch manner as that they ſhould have no inclination to

injuſtice or wickedneſs. Schools and maſters were appointed by the public authority, which the youth were obliged to attend. Here they were taught, not, as with us, only to know their letters; but to love juſtice and temperance, to obey the laws of their country, and to be grateful to their benefactors, to God, their parents and friends.

And though in our nation the care of youth is left wholly to their parents, yet every man ought to look upon himſelf as anſwerable to mankind around him, for the manner in which he brings up his children. A good education is a debt he owes not only to his offspring, but alſo to that ſociety to which he is indebted for all that is dear to him, and for which he ought to entertain a moſt ſacred regard. He cannot juſtly boaſt that he has done ſervice to the world by raiſing up children, and barely increaſing the number of men; for, if by neglecting their education he turns them out vicious and diſſolute, it had been better for ſociety they had never been born. But he, who, having raiſed a family of children, forms them by his care and inſtructions to the love and practice of piety, juſtice, humanity,

humanity, induſtry and temperance, and thus qualifies them to fill up ſome ſtations in life uſefully and well; ſuch a man performs an important ſervice to the world, and upon this account deſerves well from human ſociety.

Thus in whatever light we conſider education, whether as it regards the perſons educated, or their parents, or ſociety in general; in each of theſe reſpects we find it to be an affair of the laſt conſequence. Theſe reflections demand principally the attention of parents; and from what has been ſaid we may take occaſion to exhort them, that they uſe their utmoſt induſtry and prudence in educating their children. Would you conſult their welfare? This is the moſt effectual way of promoting it. Do you deſire to have comfort and ſatisfaction in them? You have little reaſon to hope for it, if you neglect their education. Would you ſee them uſeful, beloved, and reſpected in the world, when they are grown up? All depends on the care you beſtow upon them at preſent. Loſe, therefore, no time, but take them while their minds are yet tender and ſuſceptible of good impreſſions. Spare not

your own pains; ſeize every opportunity that preſents itſelf, of inſtilling into them ſome juſt ſentiments; and let it be the buſineſs and pleaſure of your vacant hours to aſſiſt the dawn of reaſon, and inſtruct them in the rules of prudence and virtue. Grudge not any expence your circumſtances will allow to procure them the beſt inſtructions; for if you ſhould take ſomething from their fortunes to improve the advantages of their education; perhaps neither you nor they will ever have reaſon to repent of it.

But many are ſo ambitious to leave their children rich and great, that they can ſpare nothing towards their education. One of this character once came to a wiſe man, and deſired to know for how much he would undertake to inſtruct his ſon? The other fixed his price, which the careful father thought extravagant; complaining, that with ſo much he could buy a ſlave. Do ſo then, replied the other, by all means, and you will have two ſlaves, the ſlave your ſon, and the ſlave you purchaſe. Strange that men's reaſon ſhould be ſo far blinded by avarice and vanity, as to imagine it poſſible for their children to be happy

if they are rich; while at the ſame time they are brutiſh, ignorant, and vicious. I grant you ought to conſider the circumſtances of your family; but if you lay out leſs upon your bodies, it will perhaps be no worſe for them, and you will have more to ſpend in improving their minds. And though by this means their fortunes ſhould be ſomewhat diminiſhed, yet they will be better qualified to uſe and improve the remainder; ſo that, in this caſe, that paradoxical ſaying of an old ſage is moſt certainly true, that *one half* is more, that is, better than the *whole*. As to yourſelf, it will be far more honourable to your name that it ſhould be ſaid you were the father of an excellent man, than that you left your ſon [illegible] in the poſſeſſion of great riches. And with reſpect to your children, what can all the wealth in the world avail them, if they want the ſenſe and virtue to apply it to their own, and to the benefit of others? Could you ſee them after you are dead, expoſing themſelves to infamy by their ſordid avarice, or waſting their ſubſtance in riot and debauchery, how would you repent of that parſimony for which you now eſteem yourſelf ſo

wiſe and prudent? Beſides, your children may be deprived of the wealth you leave them, though they ſhould not be guilty of any imprudence. Whereas, the good qualities you cheriſh in their minds can neither be taken from them by force, nor loſt by accident. They will not only conduce more than any thing elſe to their happineſs in this life; but when the time comes at which they muſt part with all outward enjoyments, theſe alone will defy death, and ſecure to them a bleſſed immortality.

Let me, therefore, exhort and conjure you, by all that is ſacred; by your regard to God, who has committed to your care theſe immortal ſpirits; by the love you bear to your children; and by all the hopes you entertain concerning them; that you apply yourſelves to this great affair, with a concern proportioned to the importance of it. Thus if (which God forbid) your beſt endeavours ſhould fail of ſucceſs, yet you will have the ſatisfaction to think you have acquitted yourſelves and done your duty; a conſolation, which though perhaps it cannot remove, will however alleviate your grief at ſuch a ſad diſappointment. But

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if (as you have good reaſon to expect) the improvement of your children ſhall be found anſwerable to your diligence about them, you may well count it among the greateſt bleſſings of your life; you will ſee them growing up under your care into noble and excellent creatures, the delight of your eyes, the joy of your hearts, the ſolace of your declining years; happy in themſelves, uſeful in life, affectionate and ſerviceable to you; loved by the good, reſpected by all men; and, to crown all, bidding fair for eternal felicity.

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SERMON XIII.

AN ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD, THE BEST SUPPORT UNDER AFFLICTIONS.

JOB xxii. 21.

Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.

THE exceeding corruption and folly of man is in nothing more manifeſt, than in his averſeneſs to entertain any friendſhip or familiarity with God; though

though he was framed for that very end, and endued with faculties fitting to attain it; though he ſtands, and cannot but be ſenſible that he ſtands, in the utmoſt want of it; though he be invited, and encouraged to it, frequently, and earneſtly, by God himſelf; and though it be his chief honour, advantage, and happineſs, as well as his duty, to comply with thoſe invitations.

In all caſes, where the body is affected with pain, or ſickneſs, we are forward enough to look out for remedies, to liſten greedily to every one that ſuggeſts them, and upon the leaſt hopes of ſucceſs, from the reports of others, immediately to apply them. And yet, notwithſtanding that we find and feel our ſouls diſordered and reſtleſs, toſſed and diſquieted by various paſſions, diſtracted between contrary ends and intereſts, ever ſeeking happineſs in the enjoyments of this world, and ever miſſing what they ſeek; notwithſtanding that we are aſſured from other men's experience, and from our own inward convictions, that the only way of regulating theſe diſorders is, to call off our minds from too cloſe an attention to the things of ſenſe, and

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to employ them often in a delightful intercourſe with our maker, the author of our being, and fountain of all our eaſe and happineſs: yet are we ſtrangely backward to lay hold of this ſafe, this only method of cure: we go on ſtill nouriſhing the diſtemper under which we groan, and chooſe rather to feel the pain, than to apply the remedy. Excellent therefore, was the advice of Eliphaz to Job, when, in the midſt of his great troubles and preſſures, he thus beſpoke him, "acquaint thyſelf now with him, with God, "and be at peace. Take this opportunity of improving thy acquaintance with God, to which he always, but now eſpecially invites thee; make the true uſe of thoſe afflictions which his hand, mercifully ſevere, hath been pleaſed to lay upon thee; and be led by the means of them, though thou haſt endeavoured to know and ſerve him already, to know and ſerve him ſtill better; to deſire, and love him more: calm the diſorders of thy mind by reflections on his paternal goodneſs and tenderneſs; on the wiſdom, and equity, and abſolute rectitude of all his proceedings: comfort thyſelf with ſuch thoughts at all times, but chiefly

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at that time, when all earthly comforts fail thee; then do thou particularly retreat to theſe conſiderations, and ſhelter thyſelf under them; "acquaint now thy-"ſelf with him, and be at peace."

The firſt ſtep towards an acquaintance with God, is, a due knowledge of him: I mean not a ſpeculative knowledge, built on abſtracted reaſonings about his nature and eſſence; ſuch as philoſophical minds often buſy themſelves in, without reaping from them any advantage towards regulating their paſſions, or improving their manners: but I mean a practical knowledge of thoſe attributes of his, which, invite us nearly to approach him, and cloſely to unite ourſelves to him; a thorough ſenſe, and vital experience of his paternal care over us, and concern for us; of his unſpotted holineſs, his inflexible juſtice, his unerring wiſdom, and his diffuſive goodneſs, a repreſentation of him to ourſelves, under thoſe affecting characters of a creator, and a redeemer, an obſerver, and a pattern, a law-giver, and a judge; which are adapted to incline our wills, and to raiſe our affections toward him, and either to awe, or allure us into a ſtricter performance of every

every branch of our duty. Theſe, and the like moral, and relative perfections of the Deity, are moſt neceſſary, and moſt eaſy to be underſtood by us; upon the leaſt reflection and enquiry we cannot miſs of them; though the oftner, and more attentively we conſider them, the better, and more perfectly ſtill ſhall we know them.

The acquaintance, thus begun, cannot continue, without frequent acceſs to him; "without ſeeking his face continually," as the good pſalmiſt's phraſe is, in all the methods of ſpiritual addreſs: in contemplation, and prayer; in his word, and in his ordinances; in the public ſervice of the ſanctuary, and in the private devotions of the cloſet; and chiefly in the latter of theſe, which are, on ſeveral accounts, moſt uſeful towards promoting this holy correſpondence, by theſe means, and in theſe duties, is he to be approached, and found; and, notwithſtanding our infinite diſtance, will draw near to them who thus draw near to him, and ſhew himſelf to be a God that is at hand, and not afar off.

But in vain ſhall we approach him, unleſs we endeavour to be like him. We

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labour to be like thoſe whoſe friendſhip we ſeek; to be not only almoſt, but altogether ſuch as they are, if it be poſſible; that ſo they, ſeeing themſelves in us, may like us, for the ſake of themſelves, and go out, as it were, to meet, and embrace their own image and reſemblance. Would we then be admitted into an acquaintance with God? Let us ſtudy to reſemble him; we muſt be partakers of a divine nature, in order to partake of this high privilege and alliance! "For "what fellowſhip hath righteouſneſs with "unrighteouſneſs? and what communi-"on hath light with darkneſs?"

Yet farther one eſſential ingredient in all true friendſhips, is, a firm unſhaken reliance on him who is our friend. Have we ſuch towards God? Do we entirely truſt in him? Do we reſign ourſelves, and our affairs, abſolutely to be diſpoſed of by him? and think all our concerns ſafer in his hands, than in our own? and reſolve to believe every thing to be beſt and fitteſt for us, which he ſees beſt ſhould befal us? Are we ſtill under his rod, without a murmur? without deſpondency of mind, and without charging God fooliſhly? Do we unboſom all

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our ſecrets to him, and neither endeavour, nor pretend to hide any thing that paſſeth in the depth of our hearts from him? Do we enquire of him for his advice and aſſiſtance in every thing? and hearken to what our Lord God ſhall ſay to us, either by the inward whiſpers of our conſciences, or the outward miniſtry of his word, or the awakening calls of his providence? and give heed diligently to fulfill all the leaſt intimations of his good pleaſure, that are any ways made known to us? Then have we entered deep into, and advanced far in that holy intimacy which the text recommends: O well is it with us! Happy are we, and ſhall we be!

However, yet one thing more we lack to be perfect; in love, which is the fulfilling of this law of friendſhip, the ſureſt teſt, and moſt exalted improvement of it.

Let us conſider therefore, whether we do indeed "love the Lord our God, "with all our heart, and with all our "ſoul, and with all our mind, and with all our ſtrength.

I now proceed to conſider, how reaſonable, deſirable, and neceſſary a thing it

it is, thus to acquaint ourſelves with God, as, on many other accounts, ſo particularly on this; that it is the only true way towards attaining a perfect tranquillity and reſt of mind; "acquaint thyſelf with him, and be at peace."

Honour, profit, and pleaſure, are the three great idols, to which the men of this world bow; and one, or all of which is generally aimed at, in every human friendſhip, they make: and yet though nothing can be more honourable, profitable, or pleaſing to us, than an acquaintance with God, we ſtand off from it, and will not be tempted even by theſe motives, though appearing to us with the utmoſt advantage to embrace it.

Can any thing improve, and purify, and exalt our natures more than ſuch a converſation as this, wherein our ſpirits, mounting on the wings of contemplation, faith, and love, aſcend up to the firſt principle, and cauſe of all things; ſee, admire, and taſte his ſurpaſſing excellence, and feel the quickening power and influence of it, till we ourſelves, thus "with "open face beholding, as in a glaſs, the "glory of the Lord, are changed," gradually, and inſenſibly changed, "into

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"the ſame image, from glory to glory, from one degree of perfection, and likeneſs, to another? What an honour is it to us, that God ſhould give us minds capable of ſuch an intercourſe with the ſupreme, univerſal mind? and ſhall we be capable of it, without enjoying it?

In what converſation can we ſpend our thoughts and time more profitably, than in this? To whom can we betake ourſelves, with greater expectations to ſucceed in our addreſſes? Upon whom can we rely with more ſecurity and confidence? Is he not our moſt munificent benefactor, our wiſeſt counſellor, and moſt potent protector and friend? both able, and willing to do every thing for us, that it becomes either us to aſk, or him to grant. Are not the bleſſings both of this world, and the next, in his diſpoſal? and is not his favour and good will the only ſure title that we can plead to them? and ſhall we ſpend our time therefore in cultivating uſeleſs and periſhing acquaintances here below, to the neglecting that which is of the greateſt concern to us, and upon which our everlaſting welfare depends? Shall we not rather

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ſay, with St. Peter, "Lord, to whom "ſhall we go? thou haſt the words of "eternal life."

O! the ſweet contentment, the tranquillity, and profound reſt of mind that he enjoys, who is a friend of God, and to whom God, therefore, is a friend; who hath got looſe from all meaner purſuits, and is regardleſs of all lower advantages, that interfere with his great deſign of knowing, and loving God, and being known, and beloved by him; who lives as in his ſight always, looks up to him in every ſtep of his conduct, imitates him to the beſt of his power, believes him without doubt, and obeys him without reſerve; deſires to do nothing but what is agreeable to his will, and reſolves to fear nothing beyond, or beſide his diſpleaſure: in a word, who hath reſigned all his paſſions and appetites to him; all his faculties and powers; and given up his ſoul to be poſſeſſed by him, without a rival. Surely ſuch a one hath within his breaſt, that divine "peace which paſſeth all underſtanding;" is inconceivable by thoſe who are ſtrangers to it, and inutterable even by thoſe upon whom it reſts. In vain doth the ſcornful

ful voluptuary aſk for an account of it, which can never be given him; for it hath no alliance with any of the pleaſures of ſenſe, in which he delights; nor hath he any ideas, by which the perception of it may be conveyed to him. It may make the prophet's challenge and ſay, "To what will you liken me? and "wherewithal will you compare me?" This peace is to be underſtood only by being enjoyed; and ſuch an acquaintance with God as the text recommends, is the only means of enjoying it. But I proceed, in the

Laſt place, to ſhew, that the moſt proper ſeaſon for ſuch a religious exerciſe of our thoughts, is, when any ſore trouble or calamity overtakes us: "Acquaint thyſelf now with him," ſaid Eliphaz to Job; that is, *now*, when the wiſe diſpoſer of all things hath thought fit to pour out affliction upon thee; then that peace, or ſweet calm and repoſe of mind which the text mentions, is moſt needful for thee; and is always, and only to be had from the ſame hand that wounded thee.

We are by nature indigent creatures, incapable of ourſelves to content and ſatisfy ourſelves; and therefore are ever

looking abroad for ſomewhat to ſupply our defects and compleat our happineſs. To this end, our wills and affections run out after every ſeeming good here below; but return empty and unſatisfied always from the purſuit, and therefore cannot but ſuggeſt to us the thought, and poſſeſs us with the deſire of ſome higher good, which is their only adequate object, and in which alone true joys are to be found. But we have the moſt feeling ſenſe and experience of this truth, when the hand of God lies heavy upon us: then we plainly diſcern our own inſufficiency and weakneſs, and yet ſee nothing about or near us, that can afford us any real relief: and therefore we fly to him who only can, who is rich in mercies, and mighty to ſave: both able and willing to ſtretch himſelf out to all our wants, and to fill our emptineſs. Even they, who in their proſperity forget God, do yet remember and turn to him when adverſity befals them: they, who, whilſt the courſe of things goes ſmoothly and happily on, and every paſſion of theirs is entertained, and every wiſh is gratified, find no room for thoughts of this kind: but are ſo taken up with enjoying the bleſſings,

bleſſings, as not to be at leiſure to conſider the great author and beſtower of them; even theſe perſons, in the day of their diſtreſs, take refuge in reflections on the benignity and goodneſs of God; and begin then to think of him with ſome kind of pleaſure, though allayed with doubts and fears, when they can with pleaſure think of nothing beſides him. How much more ſhall devout and blameleſs ſouls, which have never been ſtrangers to theſe conſiderations, retreat to them in an evil hour with eagerneſs, and reſt in them with the utmoſt ſatisfaction and delight? The acquaintance which they ſtand in need of for their ſupport, is not now firſt to be made: it has been contracted long ago, and wants only to be renewed, and applied to particular exigencies and occaſions. Happy, extremely happy are they, who, by the means of a virtuous temper, and a religious education, have been trained up in this acquaintance from their very youth, that ſeaſon of our age when the friendſhips we enter into are moſt ſincere and true, moſt paſſionate and tender, moſt firm and durable: whilſt our minds were as yet untainted with falſe principles, and

vicious cuſtoms, and had not drunk in that contagion from ill company, which indiſpoſes us for better, had not made that "friendſhip with the world which is enmity with God": when God moſt valued the offer of our hearts, and we could give them up to him moſt eaſily, and moſt entirely. And when once we have thus early and thoroughly devoted ourſelves to God, there are no trials of our virtue and courage ſo ſharp, no evils ſo great, but that we can ſuſtain and bear them: for "God is our hope and ſtrength, a very preſent help in time of trouble:" and therefore we reſort to him on ſuch occaſions with the utmoſt readineſs and confidence, even as a ſon doth to a beloved and loving parent, or a friend to the friend of his boſom, "caſting all our care upon him," as knowing that "he careth for us."

"I have ſet God always before me," ſays David, "he is on my right hand, therefore I ſhall not fall." And having ſet God always before him, what wonder is it if he found the ſpecial advantage of ſuch a practice in the time of his ſuffering and ſorrows? And therefore thus in another place profeſſes of himſelf;

ſelf; "When I am in heavineſs, I will think upon God."

And how can the pious ſons and daughters of affliction better employ themſelves than in looking up to him that hath bruiſed them, and poſſeſſing their ſouls in patience under the ſame thought with which this good prince quieted his griefs, "becauſe it is thy hand, and thou, Lord, haſt done it." What comfort and compoſedneſs of mind muſt it afford them, to conſider, that theſe are the chaſtiſements of a kind father, who means them for our good, and "doth not willingly afflict or grieve the "children of men, but even in his wrath "thinketh upon mercy: and will with the "temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, "that we may be able to bear it?"

Let us imitate the pattern which this royal ſufferer hath ſet us: let us follow this excellent guide; by laying hold of the remedy which he found ſo ſucceſsful in the day of viſitation. Let us, throughout the whole courſe of our lives, take care to make the thoughts of God ſo preſent, familiar, and comfortable to us here, that we may not be afraid of appearing face to face before him hereafter.

Let us ſo inure our minds to thoſe faint views of him which we can attain to in this life, that we may be found worthy to be admitted into the bleſſed viſion of him in the next, when "in his preſence "there will be fulneſs of joy, and at his "right hand pleaſures for evermore."

SER-

SERMON XIV.

THE CONDUCT OF THE BEREANS ILLUSTRATED AND IMPROVED.

ACTS xvii. 11.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

THE persons of whom my text makes this honourable mention, were the Jews of Berea, a city in Macedonia. Hither Paul and Silas, as we find in the

foregoing verſe, were ſent by the brethren, to preach the word of God, and propagate the goſpel; the great deſign which the apoſtles every where purſued in ſo unwearied a manner. In the beginning of this chapter, we read they came to Theſſalonica; where, in "a ſynagogue "of the Jews, Paul reaſoned with them "out of the ſcriptures; opening and al-"ledging, that Chriſt muſt needs have "ſuffered, and riſen again from the dead; "and that Jeſus which he preached unto "them was the Chriſt." How ill a reception he, and his aſſiſtant, here met with; we may learn from what immediately follows: "the Jews moved with envy," and aſſembled in a tumultuous manner, ſet all the city on an uproar, and aſſaulted the houſe in which theſe apoſtles reſided, Paul and Silas were maliciouſly accuſed by them of acting contrary to the decrees of Cæſar, and ſetting up Jeſus for a king in oppoſition to him. Such was the treatment which they met with from the Jews at Theſſalonica. But the minds of the Bereans were differently affected, as being indeed more noble and generous; they were ſo far from committing the ſame riotous diſorders; ſo far from

from giving any diſturbance to Paul and Silas; that, as we read in my text, "they "received the word with all readineſs of "mind, and ſearched the ſcriptures dai-"ly, whether thoſe things were ſo:" that is, whether the apoſtles' preaching was conformable to their ſcriptures of the old teſtament; and how it agreed with the prophecies and declarations therein contained. In treating on theſe words I ſhall,

Firſt; enquire into the conduct of the Bereans, as the ground of the applauſe here given them. And,

Secondly; Conſider what is proper to be obſerved from thence for our own uſe and direction.

Firſt; I am to enquire into the conduct of the Bereans, whereon is grounded the applauſe here given them. That they are here applauded is very manifeſt. For though, according to the literal meaning of my text, their behaviour is only repreſented as better than theirs in Theſſalonica; which it might be without meriting any praiſe; yet, according to the uſual conſtruction of ſpeech, we are to underſtand by the expreſſion, that the Bereans were really praiſe-worthy; and

that they behaved themſelves upon this occaſion in a wiſe and dutiful manner. To proceed therefore, one part of their conduct and character is, "that they re-"ceived the word with all readineſs of "mind;" that is, they willingly and gladly gave ear to the apoſtles' doctrine, and were ready to embrace it, as ſoon as ſufficient evidence of the truth of it ſhould appear to them. In the mean time they gave due attention, as became them; and as the weight and importance of the ſubject required. They diſcovered no ill-will, no diſaffection towards thoſe that preached it to them; but heard them candidly and favourably, without prejudice or prepoſſeſſion, and with minds open to conviction. As they were men, and reaſonable creatures, they ſhewed themſelves willing to be informed and inſtructed; and were fairly diſpoſed to receive the truth, whoever offered it; eſpecially ſuch truth as appeared to be of the greateſt moment, and immediately related to their duty and welfare. As they were ſinful men, and tranſgreſſors, with the reſt of the world, againſt the laws of God; they thought they had the utmoſt reaſon to liſten joyfully to the tidings of a Saviour, who, as they

they were told, had redeemed all mankind from their ſins, and expiated their guilt; who had moreover brought men to ſalvation, and made known to them the way to eternal life. They were ſenſible this was a matter of the greateſt conſequence; and whether theſe tidings proved afterwards true or falſe, that they well deſerved, in the mean time, their moſt ſerious attention and examination. Laſtly, as they were Jews, to whom the promiſe of a Meſſiah was more immediately given; they looked upon themſelves as particularly concerned to hearken to thoſe who preached him to them; who declared that he was actually come into the world, and had already anſwered the ends of his coming. Such an account as this ought to be peculiarly welcome to the Jews, as they were then expecting it with the utmoſt impatience. The gentile world was not pre-acquainted with the great author of their redemption, and happineſs; but ſat in darkneſs and ignorance; not expecting a Saviour, and ſcarce knowing that they wanted one. But he had long before been revealed and promiſed to the Jews; to whom therefore the news of his arrival ought to be in a particular man-

ner grateful and good. Accordingly the Bereans acted like men that had a juſt ſenſe of this matter; hearing the apoſtles, and "receiving the word with all readineſs of mind." They only deſired a reaſonable proof and confirmation of this weighty truth; and to that they immediately applied themſelves with great diligence and chearfulneſs.

What further recommends their conduct, is their diveſting themſelves of thoſe prejudices which poſſeſſed the generality of the Jews, and hung upon the minds of almoſt the whole nation. Their thoughts and expectations were wholly fixed on a ſecular Meſſiah, who, by force of arms, might reſcue them from the Roman yoke, and reinſtate them in their former grandeur and independence. Upon this account our Saviour, whoſe figure and appearance promiſed nothing like this, but rather the quite contrary; was rejected by them with great ſcorn and contempt. His completion of prophecies, the number and greatneſs of his miracles, the divineneſs of his doctrines, availed nothing with thoſe, whoſe inclinations were immoveably fixed on a temporal deliverer. This then being the common diſpoſition

ſition of the Jews, it was highly praiſe-worthy in the Bereans to lay it aſide; to break through ſo general a prejudice, and give ſuch a fair and impartial hearing to the apoſtles.

The other part of the character, and the praiſe given them in my text is, that they "ſearched the ſcriptures daily, whether thoſe things were ſo." That is, examined whether the apoſtles' declarations were conformable thereto; and whether the Meſſiah, now preached to them, anſwered the deſcriptions and characters given by the prophets. Now as hearing, and "receiving the word readily," ſhewed the honeſty of their minds: ſo their thus "ſearching the ſcriptures" is a proof of their wiſdom and good underſtanding. How good and acceptable ſoever the apoſtles doctrine might be; it was certainly proper before they embraced it, to ſatisfy themſelves about the truth of it; that they might not expoſe themſelves to deluſion and diſappointment. Without this, neither could their joy be reaſonable, nor their faith well-grounded. Though they readily heard the apoſtles, and gave attention to their preaching; they knew it was not fitting to give their aſſent,

aſſent, without previous ſatisfaction, and proper evidence. And herein likewiſe their proceeding was manly and rational, and ſuch as became lovers of truth. As to that particular way wherein they ſought ſatisfaction, it was manifeſty the moſt ſecure that could have been taken by Jews. They had a former revelation in their cuſtom, and could admit of no other that appeared contradictory thereto, or inconſiſtent therewith. So far therefore they were under a neceſſity of trying the apoſtles' doctrine by the rules, and bringing it to that teſt. But further, the expected Meſſiah was ſpoken of in their own ſcriptures. Their prophets had pointed him out, and deſcribed him at large; ſetting forth his perſon, and appearance, under a great variety of circumſtances; and laying down many marks and ſigns by which he might be known, whenever he ſhould arrive. It was therefore neceſſary to examine whether thoſe prophecies were fulfilled, and thoſe deſcriptions anſwered in him, whom the apoſtles now preached to them. On this account it was, that they ſearched the ſcriptures; and it appears from my text, and from the nature of the thing,

thing, that this part of their conduct likewiſe was good and laudable. Upon the whole, we ſee how the Bereans merited the praiſe here given them. They readily gave ear to the apoſtles' doctrine, and then examined it in a proper manner. Being neither backward to give attention, nor haſty in ſurrendering up their belief; they happily avoided the extremes of obſtinacy and credulity. I come now in the

Second place to conſider what we are to obſerve from hence for our own uſe and direction. Firſt then we cannot but obſerve, that the Bereans are a fit pattern for our imitation, in reſpect of the good diſpoſition which they ſhewed for the reception of truth. Truth in general is the food of our minds; and therefore it muſt be unnatural, as well as unreaſonable, to be negligent and indifferent about it. We ought to maintain a perpetual inclination for it; and gladly to give it admittance whenever it is offered. If our faculty of underſtanding be valuable in a high degree, as we univerſally acknowledge it is; it muſt be upon account of the excellence of its object. In vain are we capable of coming to the knowledge

ledge of truth, if we take no care to obtain it. If incapacity be a misfortune, yet however, it is no crime; but voluntary ignorance is both; as implying an abuſe of a talent that God has given us. And as we ought to be well affected towards truth in general, ſo more eſpecially ought we to regard ſuch truth, as is of the greateſt conſequence, and affects our higheſt intereſt. Now religious truth claims the preference of all others, becauſe religion is the firſt and greateſt concern we have. The proſperity of our ſouls depends upon it: to diſcover the true religion is to find out the way to eternal life. This therefore merits above all things our care and attention. In order to obtain the favour of God, and the happineſs conſequent thereupon, it is neceſſary that we diſcharge thoſe duties which are incumbent upon us. And in order thereto, we muſt know what they are, and what it is that God expects from us. If he has fixed certain terms and conditions of ſalvation, and pointed out a way wherein we are to walk; it highly concerns us to be rightly informed about this matter. And if we have means and opportunities of knowing it, and yet remain

main ignorant; that ignorance muſt be inexcuſable. In ſhort, whatever way God is pleaſed to communicate his will to us, we muſt attend to it reverently, and "receive it with all readineſs of mind."

But, ſecondly, we ſhould do well to imitate the Bereans in their impartial and unprejudiced manner of proceeding. In vain do we hearken with due attention, if we be any way diſabled, or indiſpoſed for paſſing a right judgment on what we hear. Now prejudices in the underſtanding are the ſame obſtacle to the nouriſhment of the mind, that diſorders in the ſtomach are to the ſuſtenance of the body. A readineſs to hear and learn without an impartial diſpoſition, is only an appetite without a power of digeſtion. And as this muſt needs produce ill effects in general, ſo it is peculiarly miſchievous in reſpect of the truths of religion; the importance of theſe being infinitely greater than any other. The knowledge of our duty is neceſſary in order to the performance of it, and on the performance of it our ſecurity and welfare ultimately depend. We cannot here err with impunity, if our errors be in any degree wilful; as thoſe gene-

generally are which ſpring from prejudice and partiality. Without doubt it is ordinarily in our power to keep our minds rightly diſpoſed; and ſuppoſing it otherwiſe in any caſe, yet our utmoſt endeavours muſt be uſed before we can be entitled to ſuch a plea. In ſhort, it concerns us to take all poſſible care, that we intercept not the light of heaven, nor diſqualify ourſelves for the reception of the ſaving truths of our moſt holy religion. Not as lovers of darkneſs, hardening our minds againſt conviction; not "corrupting the word of God, or per-"verting the goſpel of Chriſt;" but receiving the truth in the love thereof, with ſimplicity and ſingleneſs of heart. But,

Thirdly; From the character here given the Bereans we may learn the folly and abſurdity of implicit faith. That is, of blindly ſurrendering up our belief without previous enquiry, and due examination. For thoſe men are applauded in my text for taking a quite contrary method. They did not embrace the apoſtles' doctrines till they had brought them to the teſt, and compared them with the ſcriptures, their acknowledged rule

rule of faith. And this we find was a laudable practice: from hence then it follows very plainly, that implicit faith is ſo far from being our duty, that it is in reality blameable, and therefore to be avoided. How hard is it then, that ſuch a faith as this ſhould nevertheleſs be required by the Romiſh church of all its members? How ſtrange and ſhocking that any body of chriſtians ſhould be enjoined to believe implicitly, and blindly; when the praiſe of the Bereans is upon record in ſcripture for refuſing to believe ſo?

Nothing is to be found in the ſcriptures that even ſeems to countenance implicit faith. "Beloved," ſays the apoſtle, "believe not every ſpirit, but try the "ſpirits, whether they are of God. Prove "all things," ſays another, "hold faſt "that which is good." Theſe, and many other declarations of a like nature, are utterly irreconcileable with ſuch a faith as we are ſpeaking of. As all true religion is, and muſt be, a reaſonable ſervice; ſo pure and undefiled chriſtianity, the more it is proved, and examined, the better it will be eſteemed, and the greater ſatisfaction it will ſurely give.

give. If any of its profeſſors be jealous of having their doctrines examined, and brought to light; they may have good reaſon perhaps to apprehend danger. They may be afraid perhaps of having their beloved errors detected, or their profitable corruptions expoſed. Let them therefore be jealous, who have cauſe to be ſo. We have no grounds for any ſuch fears or apprehenſions. Pure and uncorrupted chriſtianity dreads no trial that is fair, no examination that is honeſt; but invites men to ſearch into it, and even acknowledges thoſe to be its beſt votaries, who ſearch into it the deepeſt; provided they do it ſincerely, and in a proper manner. Did the apoſtles apprehend any ill conſequence from the enquiries and examinations of the Bereans? Or did they diſcountenance them in any degree? On the contrary, we find thoſe men are highly commended for ſuch a rational proceeding, and their name tranſmitted to poſterity with honour and applauſe. We may juſtly therefore look upon them as a proper pattern for our imitation; both in reſpect of their impartiality and their integrity. Our religion we profeſs only to derive from

from reaſon and ſcripture, and thither we refer men for the diſcovery of its truth and excellence; not doubting but it will ever be found ſtrictly conformable to both. It is a diſgrace to chriſtianity not to ſuffer it to be examined; and it is a double diſgrace to it to ſhut up the ſcriptures by which it is to be examined.

It muſt indeed be confeſſed, that men may make an ill uſe of the holy ſcriptures, and even "wreſt them to their own deſtruction." But does it follow, that the generality of chriſtians ought to be deprived of them upon that account? What good thing is there in the world which may not be abuſed and perverted? All the bleſſings of life, nay, our very ſenſes and underſtandings might be forfeited by this rule; foraſmuch as all theſe are ſometimes abuſed and miſemployed. It is indeed remarkable, that the ſame authority which forbids men the free uſe of the ſcriptures, condemns alſo the free uſe of their underſtandings; and even requires them to diſbelieve their ſenſes. And what wonder if they, who take away the light of revelation, do likewiſe endeavour to extinguiſh the light of nature?

But

But to return, ſince it is acknowledged that we may make an ill uſe of the ſcriptures, it certainly concerns us in a very particular manner to beware of ſo doing. A great part of them is ſo plain, as to be intelligible to the moſt ordinary capacities; other parts are leſs plain, and ſome even difficult and abſtruſe to every reader. And though we ought not to be debarred the ſtudy even of theſe, yet if we have not that capacity and thoſe acquired talents which are requiſite for the unfolding of them, it is neither reaſonable nor ſafe to pretend to it. Though it be every chriſtian's undoubted privilege to judge for himſelf, yet certainly that privilege is abuſed when men take upon them to judge in ſuch caſes as are quite out of their reach. It can never be required of any man that he ſhould underſtand thoſe parts of ſcripture, of the meaning of which he finds himſelf utterly unqualified to form any judgment. In theſe caſes he ought to ſuſpend, and determine nothing; as being the wiſeſt and ſecureſt courſe he can take. In like manner thoſe who are better qualified to judge, make an ill uſe of ſcripture, when they apply themſelves to the interpretation

tion of it with prejudice and prepoſſeſſion; when, inſtead of enquiring ſincerely for the true ſenſe of it, they endeavour to bend and accommodate it to their own preconceived opinions. Such a proceeding being utterly inconſiſtent with that love of truth, and that deference for inſpiration, which are indiſpenſably required of all chriſtians. Laſtly, we muſt carefully avoid the ſpirit of cavilling and contention; not ſeeking for occaſions of wrangling and unneceſſary diſputations, but ſoberly and impartially ſearching for the truth, and acquieſcing in it when found. In ſhort, we muſt ſtudy the ſcriptures with no other aim, no other view, but that of inſtruction; imploring at the ſame time the aſſiſtance of that ſpirit by which they were inſpired. Thus they will be read not only with ſafety, but great benefit; and, by the bleſſing of God, and our own honeſt endeavours, "make us wiſe unto ſalvation."

The END *of* VOL. III.

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